Gendered Reproductive Negotiation and Family Formation: Latino/a Parents and Voluntarily Childless Couples in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas

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GENDERED REPRODUCTIVE NEGOTIATION AND FAMILY FORMATION: LATINO/A PARENTS AND VOLUNTARILY CHILDLESS COUPLES IN DALLAS/FORT WORTH, TEXAS
GENDERED REPRODUCTIVE NEGOTIATION AND FAMILY FORMATION: LATINO/A PARENTS AND VOLUNTARILY CHILDLESS COUPLES IN DALLAS/FORT WORTH, TEXAS

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with a

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by

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My dissertation explores tensions between the empirical reality that Latino/a birth rates have been slowing in the United States since the Great Recession in 2007 and American discourse that presumes Latinos/as are a fairly homogenous group with “excessively” high fertility rates. This study is an intervention in the literature on Latino/a reproduction that assumes large family size as well as the literature on voluntarily childless couples, who are generally assumed to be Anglo in the American context. I explore these tensions with the case study of middle-class heterosexual Latino/a couples in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas. I compare voluntarily childless Latinos/as with parents to learn about reproductive negotiations through the lens of gender and power. In my research, I wanted to learn: What particular configurations do participants in my study want for their families, and why? What are their views on gender, marriage, and parenting? Why do they want small families, and how do their parents and grandparents feel about this? These are central questions that I explore throughout this dissertation.

I examine these questions through qualitative analysis of narratives of marital histories and reproductive negotiation. I spent a year conducting ethnographic fieldwork with middle-class Latinos/as and worked with thirty-five individuals whose narratives represent twenty-one
heterosexual couples to gather these narratives. (Not all male partners agreed to participate.) I use an intersectional framework (focusing on gender, race/ethnicity, and class) to understand power structures that shape participants’ views of and decisions around family formation. Through their narratives, I identify ways that participants move within, challenge, and reify these power structures both individually and within couples.

I find that issues of parenting and family formation are important to both men and women, but still primarily fall on the shoulders of women. Moreover, many Latinas experience role conflict between middle-class expectations and familial expectations in ways that men do not. For these reasons, women in the study generally had final say on reproductive decisions, while their husbands maintained flexible ideas about family formation. Middle-class Latinas in my project employ one of three strategies to deal with the role conflict they experience: forgoing motherhood, delaying motherhood or career, or leaning on family support (often based on familismo) to mitigate role conflict.
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In memory of two of my biggest supporters, whose belief in me never wavered: my father, Glenn Lott, and my mentor, Dr. Victoria Lockwood. They both passed away before they could see the results of my research, but each one’s encouragement made this project possible.
CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

This morning I am sitting in the dining room of an East Dallas home. The house is cozy and clean; I feel welcome instantly. Irene (31), her husband, Alberto (34), and their two children under 10 are temporarily living here. This is Irene’s grandmother’s house; she recently fell and broke her hip. Irene was raised for a time in her childhood by her grandmother, and she always got along with her better than her mother. Irene knew when her grandmother needed support during her injury, that she would step in and help care for her. She does this even though she is a student, works, and has two children. And she doesn’t like staying in the house: it was never retrofitted to add central air conditioning, which is the norm in Dallas, where summers are hot and long. She is eager to return to her modern house in a Dallas suburb.

Alberto is asleep. He works nights, and Irene ensures that the children do not bother him so that he can sleep. Irene’s daughter just got a kitten, and she is upstairs playing with it. Her son is watching television in the living room. Her grandmother is napping in a chair near her son. Irene is making breakfast for the family and offers me some. She is very excited that she has farm fresh eggs from a friend. She is cooking eggs sunny-side up and stacking them on a plate. She has already cooked sausage patties, made toast, and laid out yogurt and fruit.

I chat for some time with Irene. She has a wide smile and is outgoing and enthusiastic. She is quick to offer a joke and a laugh. Alberto’s parents stop in; they let themselves in the front door. They start chatting with Irene in Spanish as soon as they cross the threshold. They brought
over food for dinner. She tells me that they stop by unannounced frequently. Irene has come to love that her mother-in-law brings them cooked meals. They only stay for a few minutes and leave.

After Irene and I finish our interview, Alberto wakes up and has breakfast. The three of us chat about my project. I tell him that I am interviewing Latino/a couples about their families. I want to talk to couples with children and to couples who think they do not want to have children. Alberto is certain that the latter does not exist. Or if they do, they are incredibly selfish, or so Americanized that they think the world is such a bad place that they would not want to bring children into it. Irene is less skeptical but does not know anyone personally who has not had children. Irene is able to convince her daughter to eat, but her son is too wrapped up in his TV show to agree to breakfast.

Alberto and I chat next. He is confident and enjoys sharing his views on family, God, and life. His philosophy is that life is simple if one does not over-complicate it. Alberto and Irene decided their family was complete after two children. They are very happy that they had a boy and a girl. After their family was complete, Alberto did not want to get a vasectomy, so Irene underwent a tubal ligation. Irene tells me that they want to make sure they have enough money to provide well for their existing children, including higher education. They have been able to manage this because she and Alberto have taught themselves to manage money. Their families always spent money as it came in because they didn’t have budgeting skills; Irene and Alberto made it a point to learn these skills as adults.

The next week, I meet another couple, Luciana and Alex, at a hip Latin fusion restaurant focusing on tacos in Uptown, a largely walkable area near downtown Dallas populated with restaurants, yoga studios, and upscale apartments and town homes. It is absolutely pouring rain
outside, but my little car makes it safely into the parking garage. Luciana (39) and Alex (40) met in university in Mexico City, where their families still live. Alex was transferred to Dallas for work and Luciana came with him. They are both electrical engineers. Though the move wasn’t easy at first, they have come to love it in the United States. They both recently got United States citizenship. Luciana tells me that they are happy to be “part of this amazing country” and that she “she loves both countries with all her heart.” They visit their family in Mexico whenever they can, but they tell me they have family flung to the far corners of the world as well.

As our artfully displayed street-style tacos arrive at the table, Luciana and Alex explain to me why they don’t want to have children. Luciana told me:

In my case, I decided that when I was like 15 years old, very, very young, I started to read several topics when I was a teenager, and I continued reading a lot. And for me, when I was reading about overpopulation and all the issues in this world, it’s just, I decided not to bring kids to this world. Because in my opinion, this world has more than enough – from my perspective. My idea never changed.

Alex: Having kids has never been a priority for me. The first time we discussed that – there have been times maybe when I was kind of willing to – but not getting mad, or [saying] “if you don’t want to, then I don’t want to be with you.” [That] never crossed my mind. I’ve always been like, we are a couple, we live for each other. If you are happy, and you make me happy, then we are OK. So there is no need for having the responsibility but also [having a child that is not wanted]. Aside from that, I also understand the points of my wife, [but don’t always agree with her reasons]. But at the end of the day, we are a couple. That’s what matters right now; that is exactly what I want to know. If she is happy with me, and I am happy with her the way we are, then we can continue being happy.

Luciana: At 35, I told Alex that we need to decide something. I don’t want to have kids later in life. I told him, “If you want to have them, I can give you your freedom.” He said just as he did – he loves me and didn’t marry me just to have children. That meant a lot to me.

Luciana and Alex are happy with each other, work, and their life together in Dallas. They center decisions about family and life on each other.
Both of these couples are middle-class, of Mexican heritage, and live in Dallas, Texas. The meals I shared with them are as different as their lifestyles seem to be from each other. However, they are both part of the trend of slowing Latino/a birth rates in the United States, which started with the Great Recession.¹ These meetings raise questions for me. What particular configurations do they want for their families, and why? What are their views on gender, marriage, and parenting? Why do they want small families, and how do their parents and grandparents feel about this? These are central questions that I explore throughout this dissertation.

Statement of Problem

At the level of discourse, Americans have a variety of associations with Latinos/as. Ortner (2006) argues that class, race/ethnicity, and gender are all linked notions in the United States. Americans assume that Latinos/as are working class and associate lower class with “loose” sexuality in women. This is, of course, not empirically accurate, but the cultural stories we tell have power. We see this expressed in what Chavez (2013) describes as the “Latino threat.” Of particular interest to me is an assumption that sits at the intersection of class, race/ethnicity, and gender: the notion of the “hyperfertile” Latina (Chavez 2004, 2013). This is the idea that Latinos/as use “too much” healthcare, have “too many,” children, and are planning the reconquest of the United States through immigration and birth. This discourse persists and is illustrated in a variety of ways—notably, through local and national political discourse and action—despite the fact that Latino/a immigration and birth rates have both slowed since the Great Recession in 2007 (Stepler and Lopez 2016). Moreover, this assumption is repeated in the

¹ This trend is not exclusive to the middle-class.
academic literature, which typically formulates questions based on the same assumption of Latina hyperfertility (Gutiérrez 2009; Chavez 2013).

In fact, many Latinas choose not to have children; estimates of childlessness for Latinas range from 10% to 17% of all Latinas at the end of their reproductive years (Livingston and Cohn 2010; Livingston 2015). It is impossible to know what portion of this group are voluntarily childless, but it is clear that this population exists (Park 2002). However, none of the literature examining voluntarily childlessness address issues of culture, race, or ethnicity. Their samples are exclusively or largely Anglo, but, based on the literature, it is unclear if this is sampling bias or reflective of a demographic trend (Morrell 1994). This project seeks to address this gap, while also responding to critiques of the literature on Latina reproduction. Originally conceived of as a comparative group, the study also includes Latino/a parents. They still serve a comparative purpose in the study, as I find some differences between the two groups. However, I also find many similarities that led me to think carefully about the ways that class and culture affect family formation and reproductive choice among my participants as a whole.

This project addresses gendered reproductive negotiation among heterosexual middle-class Latino/a couples in Dallas/Fort Worth. It discusses how participants utilize reproductive narratives to frame family formation, gendered ideals and roles in the home, and strategies that women use to negotiate competing pressure from families and middle-class identities to manage role conflict. In doing so, this dissertation provides a window into changing family forms and gender in the United States. It also provides perspectives on ethnic diversity in the middle class.

Conceptual Frameworks

This project is largely framed by issues of gender and power, both at the interpersonal level and at the level of discourse. However, my research question sits at the intersection of
gender, race/ethnicity, and class and asks how these power structures shape family formation and reproductive decisions. To adequately address all of these components, I use intersectionality as an analytical framework for knowledge production. That is, I use intersectionality to understand the complex ways that these nodes of power interact and intersect, shaping reproductive negotiation in couples. I use participants’ gendered negotiations to understand how these constructions of power shape family formation as well as to understand how participants work within or push back against them.

I also position this research within the anthropology of reproduction. There is a strong (though comparatively recent) tradition of using human reproductive behavior to illuminate issues of gender and sexuality (Rapp 2001; Browner and Sargent 1996). I argue that reproductive negotiation—a period that some might call “preconception” (Almeling and Waggoner 2013)—falls within this category. In heterosexual couples, it is an arena where gendered roles and identities are actively negotiated vis-à-vis gendered expectations of kinship and family formation. This is similar to Petchesky’s (1984) argument that control over methods and goals of reproduction is a critical site of contestation in abortion. Carole Browner (2000) built on this work, using case studies from three Latin American contexts, arguing that cultural processes play an important role in understanding reproductive negotiations. She argues that structural processes are important, but filtered through cultural processes, such as gender ideologies. It is here that I position this project. I am interested in how intersectional forces are filtered through cultural lenses of my participants and come to shape reproductive negotiations.

Definition of Terms

I have made several linguistic choices that I use throughout this dissertation. They are, of course, immersed in larger substantive debates, which will be explored further in the next
chapter. This section discusses terms that I have decided to use in this work, how these terms are situated in my research, and how they will be employed. I focus on the terms “Latino/a” and “voluntarily childless” here.

**Latino/a**

To describe my participants as a group, I use the term Latino/a as a gender-inclusive term for my participants. I recruited from pan-Hispanic networking groups and collected data on participants’ preferred terms to describe their ethnicity. As I began research, I took the question of whether people in this group identified more as a pan-ethnic Latino/a community or with a particular national heritage (e.g. Mexican), to be an empirical question. If we take participants’ first response to the question as their preference, then eighteen people used a term indicating pan-ethnicity (Latino/a or Hispanic), while fifteen used a term indicating a particular national origin (e.g. Mexican or Mexican American).\(^2\) However, I found that most did not have a strong feeling about the language used to describe their ethnic identification; many said they had not given the matter serious thought. The context for the question was that it was being asked by an Anglo woman (me), which may have influenced how participants responded to the question. Participants often told me that the ethnic identification they use differs depending on the situation, a finding also present in literature (e.g. Dowling 2014).

Most of my participants (32 out of 35, or about 91%) are of Mexican heritage, which is not a surprise in Texas. In fact, several participants’ families have lived in Texas since it was a part of Mexico. And every Latino/a who was not of Mexican heritage had a partner who was. Therefore, there is some merit to saying my project is about Mexican American couples.

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\(^2\) Two responses fell outside of this framework.
However, since the sample is not comprised totally of Mexican Americans, I feel it is more accurate to refer to it as Latino/a.

A term gaining popularity is Latinx. It is born of the Internet and has been picked up among social justice workers and, to an extent, in academia. Latinx is a gender-inclusive term along the lines of Latino/a or Latin@; however, it has the advantage of moving beyond the gender binary\(^3\) suggested by the latter two terms. No participant of any age in my study used the term Latinx when describing her/his ethnicity. Interviews were conducted around the time that the term started to gain popularity online but before it became common-place. So it is possible that if I asked them again in 2018, some of the younger participants might have a different response. Moreover, all but one of my participants identify as heterosexual,\(^4\) and all of them identify comfortably within the gender binary. For those reasons, Latino/a feels like the most appropriate term to use.

**Voluntarily Childless**

The primary term I use to describe a person who has chosen not to have children is “voluntarily childless.” Some people prefer the term “childfree” to “childless,” as it does not connote the absence or loss of children. Instead, it emphasizes their autonomy of choice (Morell 1994). However, in practice, I found that none of my respondents used the term childfree. Instead, I found the term to be associated with those who are very vocal about their choice not to have children, in particular, activists. It is also used to try to create community in online spaces. For example, I found it used for Meetups and on online message boards. It is a touchstone when a person wants to engage in activism around the rights of the childless or to find commonality with others around a hidden characteristic. In these ways, “childfree” is a helpful term. However,

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\(^3\) Gender system with two distinct categories of gender and sex, masculine and feminine.

\(^4\) One woman in a heterosexual marriage identified as queer.
despite searching the local childfree Meetup and relevant web sites, I was unable to find any Latino/a couples who met my study criteria. These groups do not have data about their members, but based on my experiences, they are largely Anglo, and it is not likely to find many Latino/a couples among them. It is clear that childfree is not the best term to use for my population, though it is one that is commonly used in the literature.

In order to discuss trends, I will use the following terms to delineate my research samples: voluntarily childless and parent/parenting. Parents are often more readily identified - they identify themselves as having children. Voluntarily childless couples are ones who do not have children and do not think they will have children in the future. However, as I have discussed, reproductive practices are imprecise and changeable. Therefore, in my analysis, I will also ask if my participants can be clearly divided into these two groups or if the reality is more complicated.

Overview of Chapters

I have divided this dissertation into eight chapters. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 describe the “Theory and Analytical Frameworks,” “Research Context,” and “Research Methodology.” Chapter 2 describes the intersectional approach I use to understand reproductive narratives of middle-class Latinos/as. Chapter 3 provides context needed to understand my research population and issues in my research: Latinos/as in the United States, Latinos/as in Dallas/Fort Worth, and Latino/a reproduction. Chapter 4 describes the methods I use to address my research questions: Are there differences between parents and voluntarily childless couples and how do they navigate reproductive decisions? The rest of the chapters analyze participant narratives in terms of modernity, gender, and class, highlighting how participants’ lived experiences illustrate larger hierarchies and cultural contexts.
In Chapter 5, I describe the similarities and differences between voluntarily childless couples and parents. I then analyze participant narratives in terms of modernity and companionate marriage, which illuminates issues of identity/the self and middle-class identity. I conclude by identifying how participants frame reproduction in terms of the rational self and fate or God to navigate contradictory reproductive messages and pressures in a culturally intelligible way. These frameworks help participants navigate the contradictory reproductive pressures they experience surrounding gender, parenting, and class.

In Chapter 6, I focus on participants’ perceptions of gender and kinship. Though participants often begin their discussion of household roles in gender-neutral terms, patterns of gendered expectations and identities emerged. These patterns were similar across parents and the voluntarily childless, with small exceptions. Women were generally seen as nurturers, and it was important for men to be breadwinners. Most couples spoke of working together as spouses and parents, but voluntarily childless couples tended to use more egalitarian language than parents in their descriptions. However, in descriptions of examples, couples revealed that there were still gendered power differences in their relationships.

In Chapter 7, I use the cultural value of familismo and the framework of personhood to explore how women navigate role conflict. This chapter argues that middle-class Latinas find value in the cultural value of familismo and work to obtain personhood in their families in terms of this value. Women felt the importance of this value in their lives in part through pressures from family members to reproduce. Female participants utilized one of three approaches as they navigate role conflict: forgoing motherhood, delaying motherhood or career, or leaning on family support to mitigate role conflict.
Chapter 8 is the conclusion. In this chapter, I highlight my findings on reproduction and family formation among middle-class Latinos/as in my study. I then discuss how my study contributes to the literature on the American middle class. In particular, this chapter provides new insights on *familismo* and questions the focus on segmented assimilation theory in the literature. It then discusses approaches to social science research on Latino/a reproduction. This qualitative project helps to complicate the category of Latino/a reproduction, which has typically has limited meanings in the literature. Lastly, the chapter offers future directions for research.
CHAPTER 2:
THEORY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

This work is largely framed by issues of gender and power. I use the analytical frameworks of intersectionality and stratified reproduction to illuminate the structural inequality that frames Latinas’ reproductive lives in the United States. Gender, ethnicity, and class emerged as important categories for examination using these frameworks. Moreover, I use several gendered concepts in my analysis to better understand the gendered dimensions of reproductive negotiations in couples: gendered personhood, gendered modernity, and kinship. I also use kinship formation or “kinning” to as a mechanism of family formation and reproductive choice and as a way that women obtain personhood. As my project engages with these literatures and theories, its intersectional approach often expands how they can be used or adds depth to a literature.

The Anthropology of Reproduction

I situate my research in the tradition and literature of the anthropology of reproduction. This project addresses the paucity of ethnographic literature about reproductive decision making in voluntarily childless family units. Human reproductive behavior is an excellent site to illuminate social theory (Rapp 2001), in particular gender role organization, gender ideologies, and sociopolitical dynamics (Browner and Sargent 1996). In this tradition, this project frames reproductive negotiation as a way to gain nuanced views of how gender and power play out in
heterosexual Latino/a couples. It clarifies who has what at stake and how these values relate to
gender ideologies and kin relationships.

The field of the anthropology of reproduction is relatively new. Through the 1960s, studies of reproduction mainly utilized cross-cultural surveys (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991) or were subsumed in larger ethnographies (Browner and Sargent 1996). In the 1970s, women’s reproductive experiences were analyzed as sources of power and subordination (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991), and reproduction was central to the development of anthropological theories about gender inequality (Ortner 1974; Rosaldo 1974; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). In the 1980s and 1990s, the politics of reproduction and reproductive technologies became foci (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991; Inhorn and van Balen 2002). Throughout, the anthropology of birth has been a key thread (Sargent and Gulbas 2011). As the popularity of the field has blossomed, there have been critiques of women being essentialized as reproducers (Inhorn 2006). However, the field’s popularity has also supported the emergence of a variety of research areas. Some key examples are: disrupted reproduction, asking what happens when reproduction doesn’t go as planned (Inhorn 2007); masculinity and reproduction (Inhorn et al. 2009); LGBT parenting (Lewin 1993, 2009); adoption (Wegar 2006; Jacobson 2008); and how newer family forms affect kinship (Rapp and Ginsburg 2011; Franklin and Ragone 1998). A significant recent theme is men’s roles in reproduction and sexuality, for example: fatherhood and reproduction (Reed 2005; Inhorn, Chavkin, and Navarro 2014); men and infertility (Inhorn 2006); and men and contraception (Gutmann 2007). Importantly, and perhaps obviously, all of these foci have centered on producing children. But when the absence of children is conspicuous, and the process of not having them is often ambivalent, this absence warrants inspection.
My project will ask a question not yet posed by the anthropology of reproduction: what happens when couples do not want children? We know from ethnographic work in a variety of cultures (including Latin America) and from the literature on infertility that there are often negative social consequences for childless women. However, we are now seeing some American women actively choose to not have children.\(^5\) This new formulation will take a classic question in the anthropology of reproduction—“who may legitimately reproduce?” (Browner and Sargent 1996, 219)—and turn it on its head. Who can resist pressures to reproduce? What does this mean for actors who choose this path? How does it affect definitions of family?

**Reproduction and the Life Course**

Much of the anthropology of reproduction focuses on moments: birth, conception, genetic counseling, a waiting room. However, what happens when we conceptualize reproduction as a part of the life course? Almeling (2015, 429) argues that in social science, “[t]here has been relatively little attention to reproduction as a process that spans the life course and can involve both having children and not having children at different points” as well as a focus on events that happen in or to women’s bodies. This sounds like a strange distinction to make on face value. However, reproduction is an important part of one’s life course in a way that is malleable and shifting, imbued with meaning, personally and culturally. If we take a step back and think of reproduction as part of the “big picture,” different themes and details emerge than if we concentrate on pregnancy as an embodied experience.

For example, reproduction matches important parts of the life course in American culture. We can see this in Townsend’s (2010) work on “the package deal” for American men.

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\(^5\) It is likely that some women have always made this choice and took alternate life paths, such as becoming a nun, to avoid marriage and children. Others, such as Susan B. Anthony, eschewed family life to work toward social change. She famously helped watch Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s seven children so that Stanton could write, and was free to travel as a political organizer.
Fatherhood fits a specific and temporal place in American men’s cultural script. Moreover, Morell (1994) argues that an important part of the “midlife” life stage for women is as a time when one’s children have grown up and established their lives. Childless women are erased from this life stage: “According to these definitions, I am not a middle-aged woman. I certainly am not a middle-aged man. My midlife crisis suffers a perverse twist” (Morell 1994, xv). To complicate the matter, women’s conceptions of childlessness changes throughout the life course as feelings and identities are renegotiated (Wilson 2014). So, for the same person, childlessness could be a key identity throughout one’s life, at certain stages, or not at all. This is because childlessness is often related to other experiences and statuses so experiences can be fluid and variable (Letherby 2002).

Coming to the decision to not have children is not a distinct phase in the life cycle (Campbell 2000; Ireland 1993; McAllister and Clarke 1998; Morell 1994). Some women and men trace a decision to not have children to when they were young, while others see the decision as something they have negotiated and re-negotiated over their lives, with some coming to a final identity and decision and others keeping the door open for children, even after their reproductive years. Women and men may not have made a decision about having children before marriage, which can enhance the negotiated aspect of voluntary childlessness. Some scholars frame reproduction as an ongoing conversation in women’s lives, which can be framed in a variety of ways, such as reproductive uncertainty or waiting for God to bring a child into their lives (Wilson 2014). Many report relief when this period of negotiation ends. For example, women who choose sterilization often express “overwhelming relief at having made a significant life-course transition” (Campbell 2003, 202).
Voluntary Childlessness

So what of “voluntary childlessness?” It is an imperfect concept for many reasons. At first glance, it seems there would be clear delineations between parents and childless, and a fairly clear boundary between voluntary childlessness and infertility. As my project unfolded, I found these assumptions to be untrue. Some scholars have argued convincingly for more complicated schema. Letherby (2002) points out that infertility is conceived of as a medical condition, while involuntary childlessness is a social one. A woman can be both simultaneously. Or, after medical assistance or adoption, an infertile woman can become a mother. Or, she can be a stepmother, an adoptive mother, or a foster mother. Conversely, a woman who is voluntarily childless may have a mothering relationship with one or more children. Moreover, desires and intentions shift over the life course. Therefore, Letherby (2002) suggests it may be more sensible to discuss childlessness as a continuum. Wilson (2014), who conducted a study of women who identified themselves as “off course” reproductively, but not engaging in medical treatments to have children, found that voluntary childlessness and involuntary childlessness were not meaningful categories for her participants. Likewise, they were not for mine. No matter how I phrased recruitment questions, I received questions about who “counts” for the study. Wilson argues that voluntary/involuntary is an arbitrary distinction:

For example, is childlessness voluntary when a woman never finds the right partner, when she dislikes sex but would otherwise like to have children, or when she lacks the financial position or social support to raise children as she thinks one should? Is childlessness still involuntary if a woman refuses to use assisted reproductive technologies that are available to her or when she changes her mind after having her tubes tied? What of the intent of women who do have children? Researchers and the general public often fail to consider whether motherhood is voluntary or involuntary for the simple fact that we fall into thinking that it is the natural order of things. (13)

Wilson argues that there are three conceptions of women in the United States: mothers (can be good or bad), infertile women (damaged), and militantly childfree (looked at with
suspicion). In short, she argues that childlessness is a deviant status. Similarly, I found
boundaries between voluntary and involuntary childlessness to be porous - I relied on women
reporting that they do not want children. For some, that meant that they did not want to “do
anything about” an infertility diagnosis, with the logic that if they really wanted children, they
would have kept trying. For others, voluntarily childless meant they knew since little girls that
they did not want to be mothers. Surprisingly, designations between parent and childless were
porous as well. What about the woman who had a child as a young teen? She didn’t want a child,
and her husband is not the child’s father. They felt they were a voluntarily childless couple, even
though they had a child. On the other hand, what of a couple where the man had fathered a child
before meeting his current wife, and they did not have much contact with the child? They felt
they were parents. And what about the voluntarily childless woman who is so close with her
niece that she has a savings account for that child’s college fund? Is it so clear how each of these
couples or individuals should be categorized? Would categorizing them yield informative data,
or are the divisions arbitrary?

Intersectionality

This project is attentive to a variety of social categories, namely gender, ethnicity, and
class. Ethnicity is an important part of most of my participants’ identities, and gender is
important for most female (and some male) participants. In this way, those categories jump out
from my data as begging for attention. Class is a social category that is both gendered and
racialized. Moreover, to understand the context in which my participants are negotiating their
reproductive choices, it is important to consider limitations imposed by structural inequality.
However, gender, ethnicity, and class are also intimate components of my participants’ identities,
shaping their approach to themselves and the world.
For a cultural anthropologist, it is second nature to examine communities’ and social actors’ experiences in detail at particular social locations. McCall (2005) identifies cultural anthropologists’ tendency toward “thick description” (Geertz 1973b) and multivocality as a lending themselves to intersectional methodology. Intersectionality is an approach to scholarship that is attentive to social categories such as ethnicity, gender, and class and how they are mutually constitutive (Crenshaw 1991). It is an idea that has come to have different meanings for different stakeholders. However, Collins and Bilge (2016, 2) propose the following definition as one that would be widely agreed upon:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.

So, intersectionality asks us to consider how different nodes of inequality interact with each other to shape individuals’ lives. Moreover, an intersectional framework is not static and established; given the continually changing boundaries and overlapping areas of power that intersectional analyses deal with, the intersectional framework is always changing.

Intersectionality can be understood as its own body of knowledge and as a mode of scholarship that informs and is related to social justice work (Collins 2015). However, I employ it as an analytical framework for knowledge production. That is, as I conducted research and analyzed data, I used the framework of intersectionality to help identify where more than one axis of power was at play and what its effects are. Intersectionality is also used in understanding health (Schulz and Mullings 2005). We know that health is interconnected with social and
environmental factors, but have not always been able to intervene in the interlocking social barriers that constrain individuals (López and Gadsden 2016; Schulz and Mullings 2005). In this dissertation, this means analyzing the ways gender, ethnicity, and class intersect to shape reproductive negotiations in couples.

**Ethnicity, Race, and Racialization**

This project began with an exploration of ethnicity and culture change. This is because I was interested in how cultural ideals and processes were negotiated by participants. So my interviews focused on issues surrounding ethnic identity and culture. However, I had several participants who identified as Latino/a but were careful to tell me they were also racially white. Others brought up the issue of ethnicity and race in the context of the census, often poking fun at the division; dividing up who they are in this way is not meaningful to them. However, I also.

For most of my participants, identity as Latino/a (or a variant of that term) was a source of pride and an important part of their lives. However, it was also contextual and participants moved back and forth between a panethnic term and a term indicating national origin (e.g. Mexican American). This section discusses the concept of ethnicity, the concept of race, and some of the complicated ways these categories are used. Moreover, it addresses the process of racialization.

**Ethnicity**

This project primarily deals with ethnicity rather than race. An ethnic group considers itself to be culturally distinctive and is seen that way by others (Eriksen 1993). Ethnicity is also best understood through relationships between groups (Glazer and Moynihan 1975). Ethnic groups identify themselves as different than others, not just because of in-group similarities. Barth (1998) was likely the most influential anthropologist in describing what ethnic groups are and their functions. He emphasized that an ethnic group cannot develop in isolation. Instead,
social boundaries between groups are continually negotiated, and boundary maintenance is a continuous and contested process. This means that ethnic groups are defined from within the group by their members. I focus my discussion of ethnicity here on Latino/a pan-ethnic identity.

Pan-ethnic Identity

The terms Hispanic and Latino/a have historically-and culturally-situated meanings. Thus, use of these terms as identities can be ambivalent. Though there is no perfect answer, I will be using Latino/a throughout this dissertation in an effort to most accurately reflect my research sample. However, as I refer to others’ research and local histories, I will mirror the language the original researcher uses to describe her/his research population (such as Hispanic or Mexican American) as appropriate to retain accuracy.

The use of a pan-ethnic term, such as Hispanic or Latino/a, is not without controversy. The word Hispanic came into use in the 1970s through the efforts of various groups (Mora 2014). Latino/a activists were looking for a way to be counted as a group to make their voices heard and to gain political clout. Businesses and Spanish-language television wanted to be able to market to one large group (Hispanic), rather than smaller groups, (e.g. Mexican American). Activists and some politicians pressed the United States government to create a large umbrella for the group, which led to the 1980 formulation of Hispanic. However, this example also illustrates the fluid nature of identity labels. Conversely, Oboler (1996) reminds us that strength in numbers is not the same thing as political power. Instead, a homogenized group label, such as Hispanic, can be linked to immigrant, exile, refugee, or conquered/colonized citizen statuses. It can help create the idea of a homogenous “Hispanic experience” in contemporary United States society. Moreover, it can reinforce the history of Europe and America denoting Latin America as an inferior “other” by creating Latinos/as as symbolically different than other Americans.
Moreover, use of the terms Hispanic or Latino/a can be situated within discussion of the self and the other (Oboler 1992). Those with Latin American heritage must construct their identities in relation to the label Hispanic and its association with the racial, class-based, national, and linguistic other that Americans associate with it. Oboler’s (1992) research showed that middle-class Latinos/as are more likely to use American categories (such as Hispanic) with the goal of reflecting the progress they have attained in the United States. Conversely, working-class Latinos/as are more divided and, instead, frame their experience in the United States in terms of how much better they are doing in the United States than they would be in their home country. However, Oboler (1992) also argues that the use of the identity Latino/a is a conscious choice linked with a struggle for social justice.

In addition to the focus on the institutional development of panethnic terms and ideas, Flores-González (2017) summarizes two more ways that the literature articulates panethnicity. Some address the communal elements of Latino/a panethnicity; this work focuses on the ways that Latinos/as of different national origins feel connections to one another, for example, through the concept of Latinidad. Last, research suggests that Latinos/as often use both a national identity and a panethnic identity (Fraga et al. 2010). This was also true for my participants, who used different language depending on social contexts and felt that more than one term fit them. However, Flores-González (2017) also notes that panethnic labels can function as racial labels.

Race

Differentiation between ethnicity and race can be complicated in practice. In simplified definitions, ethnicity is defined by its members. Race is culturally constructed as a biological reality, though there is no evidence to support a biological basis (Eriksen 1993). Many argue that race is about categorization of people for purposes of control rather than group identification.
(Banton 1967; Foucault 2003). However, ethnic identities can be sites of prejudice or racism as well. Additionally, recent approaches to studying race and ethnicity among Latinos/as focus on ways that participants articulate their own racial and ethnic identities and how perceptions at a variety of levels shape these designations.

A recent theorization of racial formation in the United States argues that racial categories are created on macro-(societal) and micro-(discursive) levels (Omi and Winant 2014). At the macro-level, racial markers (e.g. facial features, accented spoken English) are defined, manipulated, and challenged through political, legal, and historical conflicts. Concurrently, personal interactions and negotiations change or reinforce the macro-level racial markers. In this way, a specific racialized identity may exist across the United States.

However, ethnicity and race are often difficult to distinguish and interact in nuanced ways. For example, Flores-González (2017) employs the concept of ethnorace to describe ways that her millennial Latino/a participants engage with race. An ethnoracial group (Alcoff 2005; Goldberg 1993) is one described by both ethnic and racial labels. For Latinos/as, the idea of ethnorace is articulated through racial and cultural attributes that make up a stereotypical Latino/a (Alcoff 2005). Latino/a young adults often do not feel like they belong in the United States because of the exclusion of Latinos/as from conventional racial categories (Flores-González 2017). As a result, they appropriate ethnic and panethnic labels as racial ones. Moreover, many participants in Flores-González’s (2017) study hesitate to call themselves American because of their ethnoracial exclusion in the United States. Others saw Latinos/as as a racial middle; since they do not fit, they see themselves in a grey area in between.
Racialization

Racialization is also a term I use throughout, especially when describing Latino/a history in the United States. The term can have a variety of meanings and uses, but is, at its core, the process by which racial meanings are attached to issues or groups (Murji and Solomos 2005). An immigrant group is racialized when it is incorporated into a racial system already in place in the country. Another use of the term is when ethnic group boundaries are defined by race (by members outside of the group). There is a complicated history of racialization of Latinos/as in the United States. Latinos/as were racialized in the early 1900s through the American eugenic agenda and considered to be a way that the white race would be weakened (Stern 2005a). However, Latinos/as were later legally racialized as white, but socially understood as nonwhite (paving the way for panethnicity to emerge) (Flores-González 2017).

For example, lived experiences of racialization shape the way that Mexican Americans in Dowling’s (2014) study talk about race. She found that while participants generally had been targets of racism, they used discursive strategies to negotiate those experiences vis-à-vis how they identify themselves racially. Some identify themselves as white to minimize the role of race in their lives, while those who use other racial identifiers actively describe the role of race in their lives. However, immigrants who have less exposure to the American system of race may choose their racial identification based on a variety of factors, including their perceived status in Mexico.

Interrelated Concepts

The basic ideas described above guide my understanding of concepts of ethnicity, race, and racialization and how they are used in this dissertation. However, they do not exist as distinct entities. There is a large literature on how the concepts of ethnicity, race, and racialization
intersect for Latinos/as in the United States. I have demonstrated some of the many contemporary approaches to understanding race and ethnicity in this population in order to give a sense of how these concepts are employed in Latino/a contexts. In this dissertation, I focus on ethnicity, with some discussion of how Latinos/as have been, and continue to be, racialized in the United States. However, since these concepts are intertwined, it is more a matter of emphasis. I focus on identity and the dynamic character of culture, but those things cannot be truly separated from issues of race, racism, and racialization in the United States.

Class

My project was not originally concerned with class beyond as a way to limit my sample; gender and ethnicity were the primary categories of analysis. However, class has emerged as part of the story. Class is not typically a concept in the forefront of the average American’s mind, but when it is employed, most place themselves in the middle-class (Zweig 2011). I discuss how I operationalize middle-class in my sample in Chapter 4, but here I outline how I employ theories of class in the United States. At the level of discourse, Latino/a implies lower/working class (Chavez 2013; Ortner 1998). However, participants in this study are middle-class. They often had no strong idea of class or class identity. However, Latinos/as in my project were aware of the intertwined notions of Latino/a ethnicity and class in the United States. Here I discuss the larger literature on the Latino/a middle class (largely located in literature on segmented assimilation). Then, I outline a framing of class in the United States, based on Zweig (2011) and discuss the ways I employ Ortner’s (2006) use of class as habitus. Using these perspectives allows me to discuss how participants in my study employ class as part of their lives and identities as they form families and negotiate kin relations.

Segmented Assimilation
The dominant literature on Latinos/as in the middle class focuses on sociological segmented assimilation theory set out by Portes and Zhou (1993). Assimilation theory asks if Latinos/as (and more generally, immigrants) are fully incorporated into American society as they gain economic resources. This theory argues that new immigrants can be incorporated into American society in one of three ways: assimilation into the white middle-class, assimilation into a minority underclass culture, and selective assimilation, where parents deliberately surround their children with a coethnic community that promotes education, in hopes of delaying assimilation to a minority underclass.

Jody Vallejo (2009, 2012, 2015) and Vallejo and Canizales (2016) engage with segmented assimilation theory but employ the concept of a minority middle-class culture (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). Minority middle-class culture is not a separate complete culture, but is a set of cultural elements that arise when members of a minority group move into the middle-class and must face structural inequality and discrimination. Vallejo and Lee (2009) use patterns of “giving back” as a measure of acculturation in their study of 1.5- and second-generation middle-class Mexicans who live in Orange and Los Angeles Counties. They found that those who grow up poor are more likely to give back to their extended kin network than those who grew up middle class. Further, they are more likely to draw on an immigrant narrative as they articulate why they give back to kin and Latino/a communities. They argue this is evidence that there are multiple ways to incorporate into the middle class, since this differs from patterns of whites or Blacks. Jody Vallejo (2009; 2012) also conducted three years of participant observation with a Latina business organization in Southern California as a way to understand middle-class Latina spaces. Her research shows that Latino/a ethnic communities are not class homogenous, and do not lack the kinds of resources (social and human capital) that promote
upward mobility. She argues that there are a variety of ways to enter the middle class, and that “downward mobility” among ethnic minorities is overestimated.

Segmented assimilation has been influential in sociology and beyond. In this dissertation, I do not employ segmented assimilation theory. Its focus on ways that groups become more similar and its core framing that reinforces the assumption of downward mobility for Latinos/as are not helpful for my study. Instead of focusing on ways that groups become similar, I am interested in how class is a culturally and historically constructed concept that influences not only one’s material reality but also one’s daily practices and outlooks. The approach of segmented assimilation does not help me understand the ways that class shapes and is shaped by participants’ reproductive choices. Moreover, much research on segmented assimilation fails to take into account research done in other areas. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013) dramatically likens the development of the literature on segmented assimilation to a “hermetically sealed steam train from another century, chugging along oblivious to developments in gender scholarship of the last 30 years” (233). She argues that segmented assimilation theory\(^6\) has generally failed to integrate studies of gender and sexuality in its perspectives and analysis, which leaves gaps in our understanding of how gender functions in immigrant incorporation. Since the core framing and goals of segmented assimilation theory do not align with my project goals (described above), rather than work within it to identify gendered components of segmented assimilation theory, I use other concepts of class unrelated to assimilation to understand class-based components of participants’ narratives.

\(^6\) Along with other isolated literatures on immigration, e.g. immigrant religion.
Class as Power Structure and as Habitus

I employ Zweig’s (2011) argument that class is about power relations and his schema of capitalist class, middle class, and working class to frame the material realities of class categories. Zweig argues that most of the United States identifies itself as the middle-class and believes that those in the middle-class work hard and play by the rules. The working class, however, is actually the largest class in the United States. He argues that using income as an indicator of class actually does not yield much information. It does not tell us how people get money, what their roles in society are, or if they are connected to powerful institutions or people. Instead, Zweig argues that class in the United States is largely about the power and authority that people have at work. This is because classes are about how groups of people are different and similar to one another in the production of goods and services. However, these power relationships extend into the political and cultural dynamics of society as well.

Zweig (2011) argues there is a rich capitalist class, a small middle-class, and a large working class. Capitalists have the most power, money, and social status; they own businesses and have power to make the rules. On the other end of the spectrum are the working class. They have little power in their jobs; they show up at work and are overseen by a supervisor. Even when they have some influence at work, it does not change their position as workers. My project focuses on the middle-class, a group with “middling authority” (Zweig 2011, 20). They are caught in the cross-fire between two large groups in the American economy (capitalist class, working class) whose goals are at odds. Examples of middle class jobs are: professionals, small business owners, managers, and supervisors.

I combine this approach with Sherry Ortner’s (2003, 2006) conception of class as a dialectical object of culture. Class is formed in specific cultural and historical contexts and is
malleable. Ortner correctly points out that the three-strata conception of class (lower/working, middle, and upper) that is obvious to Americans is itself a culturally constructed schema. Moreover, at least for white Americans, most place themselves in the middle class, regardless of income (with the exception of those on each end of the spectrum). This structure can be traced to the post-McCarthy era, in what Ortner (2003) refers to as “the middle-classing of America” (28). During the Great Depression, class consciousness and class warfare were at the forefront of American minds. But the “economic, political, and cultural project” to create consumers with the goal to buy goods worked to elevate the working class and instill aspirations to upward mobility.

Rather than being an objective measure, class can also be understood as part of one’s identity. Ortner (2003) suggests treating class in the vein of Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) *habitus*. *Habitus* is a physical embodiment of cultural capital. It is dispositions that are shaped by past events and structures, shape current practices and structures, and condition how we perceive practices and structures. As Ortner (2003) employs *habitus*, she argues that since Americans usually do not think about class, it exists as a cultural assumption external to ordinary people. They inhabit it, but do not think of it. It is internalized and causes people to feel, think, judge, and act in particular ways. The focus on class as a culturally constructed object allows us to understand the ways in which class is historically situated and how it shows up in people’s identities and actions. This is true in a variety of global contexts as well. Constable (2009) argues that a middle-class identity can be an important mediating factor in identity construction for some educated migrants. For example, the middle-class identity of Filipina maids in Hong Kong may be threatening to their employers (Constable 2007).

I use Zweig’s (2011) materially-based conception of class as a way to frame Ortner’s (2003) approach to class as *habitus*. That is, class is structured in terms of power relations in the
workplace that extend to the rest of society. However, that is not how Americans see it, which is why Zweig finds that the American middle-class is much smaller than Americans conceive it to be. Instead, Americans articulate a structure of class that is culturally intelligible. It is our perception of class that we embody and use to inform our actions. By combining these two approaches, I can be attentive to power structures and lived experiences and practices of class in my participants’ lives.

*Why Study Middle-class Latinos/as?*

There is very little ethnographic research about middle-class Latinos/as, and none of it is written by anthropologists. Most of what is written is by sociologists, who employ ethnography as a method to varying degrees. The other work is by a political scientist. There is a related literature on migration from urban areas to the United States; these migratory flows include the middle-class, but also focus on blue-collar workers (e.g. Hérnandez-León 2008). A variety of non-ethnographic shorter work on Latinos/as in the workplace also exists.

There are a variety of reasons that social scientists who work with Latinos/as have focused their work on vulnerable populations. Scholars in this area of research typically addresses theoretical questions about the movement of populations, collects data that will benefit a subjugated population, or a combination of the two. This work is important. However, working with vulnerable populations carries with it a heavy ethical weight; the anthropologist’s representation of the population can potentially have negative effects on that population (Mullings 1993). Similarly, when anthropologists only write about one segment of the Latino/a population, the body of work can unconsciously reinforce stereotypes that Latinos/as in the

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7 I also heard a paper by a graduate student (Yesenia Ruiz) about her research with Mexican Migrant Elites at the 2015 American Anthropological Association meetings, but it is unclear what her discipline is, and I cannot find any publications from her.
United States are all in a similar economic bracket. This theme will come up again in the later discussions of Latina reproduction; even though there are a variety of reproductive plans, experiences, and beliefs among Latinos/as, American discourse tends to only see “Mexicans” taking up “too much” healthcare by having “too many” children (Chavez 2004). By expanding anthropological work to a wider swath of Latinos/as, we not only gain a more complete picture of Latino/a lifeways, but we also help to expand the narrative about Latinos/as, a group often scapegoated in America. In short, I see this project as complementing the existing anthropological literature on Latinos/as, not competing with it.

**Gender, Power, and Parenting**

In this project I strive to be attentive to both men and women as gendered and understand masculinity and femininity as relational concepts (Butler 2011; Di Leonardo 1991). That is, masculinity and femininity are not each defined in a vacuum but instead acquire meaning in relation to each other. As cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity are negotiated, economic, political and cultural changes demand different roles. In the United States, women see gender roles as less rigid than in the past (Stone and McKee 2002), with women having increased autonomy (Browner 2000). However, motherhood is commonly understood as intrinsic to the female identity; it is seen as a defining attribute of womanhood, the role women are expected to easily fall into (Ireland 1993; Browner and Lewin 1982; Lewin 1993; Valenti 2012; Lowe 2016). Motherhood also can be understood as the “last bastion of the American family” (Stone and McKee 2002, 78).

Masculinities have received less attention than women’s gendered experiences, and this is no exception in the United States. Masculinity is often seen as a rigid set of characteristics associated with toughness with mechanisms in place to reinforce those characteristics (Kimmel
It is also associated with heterosexuality (Pascoe 2011). However, social scientists have documented a variety of kinds of masculinity and ways that men negotiate among the different models. For example, Connell’s (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity demonstrates that not only are there multiple masculinities, but there are also relations between the different kinds. These power-based relationships may be of alliance, domination, and/or subordination and are culturally constructed and enforced. Social scientists have also attempted to document masculinities in terms of home life and fatherhood. Generally speaking, American men are placing new importance on the role of fatherhood (Coltrane 1997), have diverse ways of being involved fathers (Marsiglio and Roy 2012), and, as a result, many are experiencing work-family conflict that fathers typically didn’t face in the past (Kaufman 2013). They also are becoming more involved in pregnancy and the birthing process (Reed 2005).

Much of the social science research on gender in the United States is not attentive to ethnicity. In contrast, classic ethnographies of Mexico describe ideals about men (machismo) and women (marianismo), wherein men are assumed to be sexually assertive, authoritative, and independent, and women are assumed to be subordinate and selflessly devoted to the family (Lewis 2011; Stevens 1973). However, contemporary studies of gender in Latin America emphasize variety in gender roles and sexuality (Gutmann 1996, 2003; Melhuus and Stolen 1996; Inhorn and Wentzell 2011; Rodriguez 2008) and highlight difficulties in navigating various Mexican and American stereotypes of gender (e.g. Smith 2006). Jennifer Hisch’s (2003) research with women in Mexico and Mexican American women found that gender ideals in Mexico have moved more toward egalitarianism, and younger Mexican and Mexican American women now prefer marriages based on egalitarianism. The literature on gender and migration

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9 The most well-known representation of this is “the man box.”
Further illuminates gendered experiences among Latinos/as in the United States, also emphasizing differing and complication transformations and continuities for men and women as they settle in the United States (e.g. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Boehm 2012). Gender can be even more complicated for the second generation, who are negotiating parents’ ideas about gender and American ideas about gender, while notions of gender are constantly being negotiated in both Mexico and the United States (Smith 2006).

In terms of dominant culture in the United States, egalitarian gender attitudes have increased since the 1960s, while expectations for mothering have become more demanding (Stone 2007; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Hays 1998). This ideal of intensive mothering supports the incompatibility of motherhood and employment and the differential social pressures surrounding reproduction for women and men (Hays 1998). Women’s identities are fragmented, as personhood is split from motherhood. However, motherhood is a contradictory status for women in the United States, as it can be both a source of power and a constraint (Ginsburg and Tsing 1990; Valenti 2012). Conversely, a nationwide study of motherhood in the 1980s found that the important variable was not whether a mother worked or stayed at home, but rather, how she felt about her lifestyle (Genevie and Margolies 1988).

Common reasons for having children in the United States are: social security (the hope there will be someone to care for them when they are older), social power, “the joy of having children,” and desire to continue one’s kin line (Inhorn and Balen 2002; Inhorn 1996; Browner and Sargent 1996; Livingston and Cohn 2010a). However, gendered power plays out differently for men and women as they make the decision not to have children. Women are often the ones to blame for a reproductive failure, in large part because contraception is often understood to be a woman’s domain (Inhorn and Balen 2002). The negative effects of reproductive failure can
profoundly affect women’s moral identities (Inhorn and Balen 2002; Kleinman 1992, 1997). This research does not deal with race or ethnicity, but generally speaking, childbearing also comes at a greater personal cost for women than for men in terms of responsibility, sacrifice, stress, time commitment, and social scrutiny (Arendell 2000; Crittenden 2002); fatherhood brings fewer personal costs and enhanced social status, economic status, and emotional benefits (Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007). Even when fatherhood is espoused as important to men’s lives, mothers are often seen as primary caregivers (Townsend 2010). These gendered power differentials combined with pronatalism and maternalism in the United States make it impossible for women to be truly free to choose whether or not to have children (Morrell 1994).

For Latinos/as, expectations about parenthood echo many of the issues in dominant culture in the United States. However, there are key differences, which I illustrate with literature on Latinos/as in the United States and key findings in Latin America. For many Latinos/as, motherhood is still closely tied to womanhood, but Mexican American women in the United States often subtly realign their understanding of motherhood, injecting agency without rejecting the notion (Rodriguez 2008). That is, Latinas sometimes use “differential movidas” or double positioning to reframe beliefs and practices around gender and power, rather than rejecting them outright. Furthermore, motherhood is a public identity in Latin America, an identity and role practiced beyond the private sphere (Stephen 1997), and women are able to obtain symbolic power through childbirth because of its association with redemption and altruism (Martin 1990; Chant 2003). In this way, motherhood has been a tool that women in Latin America have used in the public sphere to gain political positions and in activist work (Stephen 1997; Martin 1990).

For some scholars of Latin American masculinities, fatherhood is the highest form of male responsibility (Viveros Vigoya 2003; Osores 1997). However, when men are asked how to
define manly qualities, fatherhood is often left off of the list (De Keijzer 1998). Furthermore, a variety of types of fatherhood have been described in Latin America. For example, fatherhood in Mexico has changed greatly over the past 40 years (Gutmann 1996; De Keijzer 1998). De Keijzer (1998) argues the importance of recognizing plural forms of fatherhood and develops a typology: the absent/fugitive father, the traditional or patriarchal father, and the father who pretends to be egalitarian. Fatherhood is an ambivalent sphere for Mexican men, who combine elements of these models and may shift among them over their life course. Gutmann (1996) focuses on Mexican fatherhood in a particular working-class neighborhood, illustrating how men’s identities, including fatherhood, are shaped by history, geography, and class. He argues that fatherhood is an important part of men’s masculine identities among his participants.

*Reproductive Negotiation as a Contested Site*

The literature on reproduction often frames reproduction as a critical site of contestation (Annandale and Clark 1996; Rapp 2001). It is a process where gendered power can be seen at a variety of levels. For example, an influential argument in studies of abortion is that control over methods and goals of reproduction are a critical site of contest, especially between men and women (Petchesky 1984). Cultural processes also play an important role in understanding reproductive choice as a contested site. Browner (2000) argues that cultural processes are key to understanding reproductive negotiations. Browner asked if and when men’s influence carries over to reproduction (in particular in cultural contexts where men are generally thought of as having great influence and power) and when and how women act independently in this realm, traditionally understood as women’s space. In particular, she explores this process in three Latin American contexts. She argues that structural issues (economic, political, etc.) are important, but

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10 Also elaborated upon by Brandes (2003).
are filtered through cultural processes such as gender ideologies. So, while the middle-class status of my participants and American and Texan political climates are important to consider, they are filtered through cultural lenses, themselves malleable and changing in the American context (change in class, over generations in the United States, etc.).

There is also a small literature asking how heterosexual Latino/a couples address reproductive choice in the context of genetic counseling and the decision of whether or not to have an amniocentesis performed. Scholars have generally found that most Latino/a couples make decisions about amniocentesis together or that the woman makes the decision (Hunt and de Voogd 2005; Browner et al. 2003; Preloran, Browner, and Lieber 2005). This is the case in a study of Mexican-origin women in Southern California; Browner and Preloran (1999) expected that men would make many of the decisions about amniocentesis but found that women most commonly decided on their own or in discussion with male partners. Women also were most likely to say that their opinion was the most important in making an amniocentesis decision. In fact, they were more likely than other racial or ethnic groups to attend prenatal genetic counseling without their partners. Markens, Browner, and Preloran (2003, 465) found that many of the Mexican-origin couples in their study, “balance[d] their decision and talk[ed] about women having control of their bodies” and that they often framed the decision in terms of shared parenting responsibilities. They use these findings to write against the radical feminist argument that reproductive technology becomes a way for men to control women’s reproduction (Markens, Browner, and Preloran 2003). Rather, they found that women used new technologies as a way to draw men into participation in the reproductive realm. Paradoxically, this study found that egalitarian couples often reported that men and women made the decision together, but that it was ultimately the woman’s decision - a pattern I also find in couples’ reproductive negotiations.
Individuals assert their identities as modern through gendered reproductive negotiations. In many ways, my examination of modernity and gender follows Gutmann’s (1996) and Hirsch’s (2003) explorations of the topics in Mexican and (for Hirsch) American contexts. They both “look simultaneously at modernity as cultural construction and as product of social transformations that has both costs and benefits” (Hirsch 2003, 14). Moreover, governments can regulate women’s reproductive practices to construct modern citizens; conversely, one can use their reproductive practices as a way to lay claim to and demonstrate one’s modern identity (Braff 2013). I use this framing of reproductive negotiations as a window to understand gendered modernity in this dissertation.

Moreover, the modern and the traditional can be unequally exhibited in public and private spheres. For example, in Andalusia, Collier (1997) found that private spaces were more likely to be used for practices associated with the traditional—or reinvented and framed as traditional. There, in the home or at a summer festival, one may observe the “traditional” without marring the professional image of someone who thinks for oneself, associated with a modern subjectivity. She also argues that a nationalist modernity requires people to have cultural traditions, while it also constructs tradition as a site for contesting, “modernity’s impersonal rationalization of social life” (Collier 1997, 212). In this way, family and traditions in the home are understood as sites to create meaning in their lives.

I do not argue that modernity is inevitable nor that it is necessarily the same thing as progress. I am also not seeking to replicate ideas about assimilation or Americanization. Though certainly, modernity is tied to historical and political processes in a place as well as global flows, participants are not following a straight line from more Mexican/Latino to more American. Minority groups, such as Latinos/as, are responding to the same historical and political events,
but from a different position and point of view (Williams 1990). Moreover, part of the project of anthropologists is to illustrate the locally particular ways that global discourses of modernity are adopted, rejected, and expressed (Hirsch 2003).

Stratified Reproduction

An over-arching project objective is to understand what societal pressures influence Latino/a reproductive decisions in the United States. In order to fully understand the social and political contexts in which Latino/a--but in particular, Latina--reproduction occurs, I employ the concept of stratified reproduction (Colen 1990; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995). The United States is generally understood as a pronatalist state (Morrell 1994). However, there are different pressures to reproduce (or to not reproduce) for different groups of people. The structure wherein some reproductive futures are valued, while others’ reproduction is “despised” is known as stratified reproduction. Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) ask “Who defines the body of the nation into which the next generation is recruited? Who is considered to be in that national body, and who is out of it?” (3).

The multiple meanings of reproduction--for example, social and biological--that anthropologists employ are clear in these questions as we consider Latinos/as in Texas, the majority of whom are of Mexican heritage. These metaphors of the body and reproduction are also present in metaphors used to speak about immigration. In the United States, the nation is often conceived of as the body (for example, speaking of economic health or the heartland), and Mexican immigrants as a pathogen of the body11 (Santa Ana 2010). Here, the ostensibly white “native-born” Americans are the true body of the United States, while Latinos/as are destructive

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11 Of course, this is not the only use of this metaphor. For example, from another perspective, Anzaldúa (1999) conceives of the U.S.-Mexico border as an open wound.
Others. Cultural ideas about race/ethnicity and citizenship are organized hierarchically, which, among other things, places priority on some reproduction over others.

Anthropologist Leo Chavez (2013) has done compelling work analyzing how public discourse in the United States creates and supports a narrative of the “Latino Threat.” A key part of the threat is the myth of the “hyperfertile” Latina. For Chavez (2004; 2013), a central part of the structure of stratified reproduction in the United States is that Latinas, generally speaking, have less access to health services than Anglos. This is, of course, an important part of the structure of stratified reproduction in the United States. However, it is not as salient of an issue for my participants, who are middle-class, especially for those who grew up middle-class. For those in my sample who grew up poor, however, it was likely important in their lives: when their mothers were building their families and as participants navigated puberty and young adulthood.

A permutation of stratified reproduction in the United States centers on the idea that Latinas are in the United States have out-of-control fertility, are here to have “anchor babies” to gain citizenship, and to birth a “reconquest” of the land. These discourses create the stance that Latino/a reproduction should be discouraged. This reality of life in the United States for Latinos/as is in opposition with the Latino/a cultural value of familismo, which centers on the importance of family and can result in pressure for women to reproduce. In this dissertation, I use the concept of personhood to unpack these assumptions and describe these pressures.

**Personhood**

Personhood as an anthropological concept is generally traced back to Marcel Mauss’ (1985) classic essay “A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self,” originally published in 1938. It was the first attempt in anthropology to formally examine the idea of the person. Though the work took an evolutionist perspective, it has still been an
influential text, even for those who discard the sections implying a hierarchy of humanity (Allen 1985). Geertz’s (1973a) “Person, Time and Conduct in Bali,” originally published in 1966, is where personhood is first used in the anthropological literature (Appell-Warren 2014). Geertz begins by using the concept of person, but switches to the term “personhood” when discussing personal names of the Balinese, giving no explanation as to why; he does not describe or develop the concept. A colloquium on the concept of the person in Africa was held in Paris, France in 1971, and this colloquium, and its resulting volume, are another set of influential early writings on personhood; they developed and theorized the idea of personhood further than Geertz did. These works often deviated—and even contradicted—Mauss in a variety of ways, resulting in different uses of person and personhood.

Anthropologists have contributed to the cross-cultural literature on personhood by demonstrating that it is negotiated in historical and cultural contexts, rather than existing as a universal constant (Shweder and Bourne 1982). However, personhood has been used in a variety of ways and to a variety of ends in anthropological research. For example, some ethnographers and ethnologists have a psychosocial emphasis, focusing on conceptions of the self and self-consciousness (Cohen 2002). Marcus and Fischer (2014), conversely, praise ethnographic texts that do not “resort to” psychological explanations, instead highlighting discourse and personhood. They also focus on emotion as an important aspect of understanding personhood.

An important related concept is subjectivity. Subjectivity is a concept that is employed and described, but difficult to define. One’s subjectivity is the identities that a person forms, discovers, or are attributed to her/him by others (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). Its core is a dynamic tension between the bodily, the self, and social and political processes. The importance of subjectivity and its relationship to personhood are demonstrated in Biehl’s (2013) ethnography...
In this ethnography, Biehl explores zones of social abandonment in urban Brazil through someone abandoned in one such place, Vita. Catarina is a young woman who was said to be mad. Biehl (2013, 21) argues that her abandonment is a reflection of state-generated human misery: “state and family are woven into the same social fabric of kinship, reproduction, and death. Catarina’s body and language were overwhelmed by the force of these processes, her personhood unmade and remade: ‘Nobody wants me to be somebody in life.’” Catarina’s identity and bodily reality change in line with cultural and political forces as well as through subjective experimentation. Catarina’s subjectivity is constructed by a combination of her identity and the forces around her that construct Catarina’s subjectivity. The realities of her subjectivity inform, construct, and deconstruct her personhood.

Perhaps not surprisingly, personhood is a slippery analytical concept that scholars do not necessarily use in a consistent way (Shir-Vertesh 2017). For that reason, it is important that I define how I use it. Here, I am interested in personhood as what it means to be a full member of a family and/or community. I understand personhood as a status that is socially located and established via social relationships. It typically includes both external culturally specific markers and internal feelings (Appell-Warren 2014). In particular, I am interested in intersections of personhood and gender. I describe achievement of personhood, in short, as the process wherein individuals gain full social standing, becoming “somebodies” (Geertz 1973b; Watson 1986) 1986).

The importance of reproduction for women’s personhood is reflected in how closely tied the concepts of motherhood and womanhood often are; this is the case in the United States and in much of Latin America. However, there is some debate in the literature about how views of motherhood are shifting as reproduction becomes framed as a choice in American culture, rather
than as a given. Ginsburg and Tsing (1990) argue that this view of choice causes women to see motherhood as an achieved status instead of something that naturally happens. However, in Wilson’s (2014) study of women ambivalent about reproduction--both infertile and childless--she came to the opposite conclusion. For those who tend to think of their childlessness as neutral or positive, they attribute their non-motherhood to supernatural influences mostly or totally beyond their control: an ascribed status. In other words, they did not blame themselves or society for their childlessness, but instead spoke of “God’s plan” for their lives.

Having children is also important for social standing for Mexican Americans. Hirsch (2003) found that for Mexican-descent individuals, a childless family is an incomplete family, and there is great anxiety over the possibility of infertility. As Mexicans in her study were encountering American kinship norms, they started to see babies as important kin links, physical evidence of the bonds between adults (see also Schoen et al 1997). Appell-Warren’s (2014) extensive literature review of anthropological studies of personhood found that in many cultures, having children is a prerequisite for women to attain of full personhood and sometimes applies to men and fatherhood as well. Similarly, some scholars argue that, for women, making a choice not to reproduce is associated with lesser personhood (Strathern 1992; Pfeffer 1987). However, personhood is affected by reproductive choice in uneven ways. This is because systems of kinship are not uniform in the United States and have been shown to vary for men and women and for different ethnic groups (Schneider 1980; Peletz 1995; Yanagisako 1978).

Approaches to Negotiation: Decisions or Kinning?

The literature on family formation and reproduction generally frames this process as reproductive decision-making. This is also true in the literature on Anglo voluntarily childless. It is an under-developed literature, but even so, there are definitional issues and debates. One such
debate is what constitutes an intentional decision. Since for many couples, the decision to not have children occurs over time, there is debate in the literature as to whether couples are making an intentional decision (Blackstone and Stewart 2016) or just putting the decision off until biology chooses for them (Seccombe 1991; Faux 1984).

My research searches for an alternative to this framework. Certainly, couples negotiate family planning and family formation. Participants in my study, especially those without children, tended to do so as part of their marriage. However, the framework of decision-making is similar to that of choice. The idea centers on a Western ideal of a rational decision-maker and is centered in individualism.12 As participants in my study are middle-class Americans, a decision-making framework is culturally intelligible, but does not fully explain experiences of reproductive uncertainty and negotiation for Latinos/as. Given the issues defining “decision” in the current literature on reproductive decision-making, it may not be the most helpful framing for Anglo American contexts either. Moreover, if we wish to discuss reproductive negotiation in cross-cultural contexts, centering rational, individualistic frameworks is not helpful. Given the fluid, ambivalent, and contested nature of reproductive negotiations and its embeddedness in kin systems as well as identity formation, I argue that decision-making will not be the most productive way forward in understanding voluntarily childless couples’ (or parents’) family formation processes. Instead, I argue that kinship and the creation of kin links (“kinning”) is a better framework for understanding reproduction and family formation.

However, it is worth briefly discussing findings from the literature on reproductive decision-making. Some findings highlight the importance of gender. Research in the United Kingdom suggests that women are the primary decision makers in reproductive choices.

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12 This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.
(Campbell 1999; Gillespie 2003). A study in Germany found that men have greater say in fertility decisions, but women have veto power (Stein, Willen, and Pavetic 2014). Blackstone and Stewart (2016) found that in the United States, couples came to a consensus decision as a process; however, men were more worried about how having children would affect their lives as individuals, and women were more worried about how the decision would affect people other than themselves.

Other research on decision-making does not find gender to be the most important variable. One study suggests that if one partner is ambivalent about having children and the other partner has a strong desire for children, the latter wins out (McAllister and Clarke 2000). Lee and Zvonkovic (2014) found that the choice to be childless was dyadic and went through three phases: agreement, acceptance, and closing of the door. There were two driving forces in decision-making: strength of conviction and importance of the relationship. Similarly, couples worried about the stability of their marriage may decide to remain childless (Heaton, Jacobson, and Holland 1999).

Another way to conceptualize the reproductive decisions that couples in my study are making is by understanding kinship as constituted through small everyday acts (Carsten 2000) and as something that is “congealed” rather than as a preexisting structure (Franklin and McKinnon 2002). Moreover, kinship is mobilized to bring in other categories of relationality; in this case, culture and class identity are affirmed and/or reconstructed through kin bonds and family formations. Krause (2005) has emphasized the importance of historical and demographic components of changing families and kinship as “family-making,” an active and often ambivalent process. In this way, kinship also reflects and reifies relations of hierarchy and amity,
through acts of connection and acts of disconnection (Franklin and McKinnon 2002), which comes to bear in this project by way of reproductive uncertainty and “choice.”

In the United States, the normative family unit is still understood as a heterosexual nuclear family; however, the reality of kinship practice in the United States is much more varied and complicated than that (Ibarra 2016). “New Kinship” research focuses on the early stages of the family life cycle, when children are typically added to families. This time can also be understood as one in which there is typically a “thickening” of kin relations (Carsten 2000). In particular, there has been a focus on how couples “kin” children (Howell 2003). In this context, the process of kinning makes a fetus, baby, or child a permanent part of the family by giving it a kin label. This could take a variety of forms but may include parents making literal and figurative claims of active parent roles. After the initial work of kinning, kinship is reinforced through family events, ritual occasions, and common history. Love, rather than biology, becomes the important factor in relatedness and constitutes the kin links (Ragoné 1994). Scholars have been especially interested in how and why this happens in processes such as adoption and use of reproductive technologies. This focus also asks the question: What counts as family?

I also use kinship as another way to understand gender and power. Collier and Yanagisako (1987) challenged a variety of assumptions about kinship, including naturalistic assumptions about the centrality of the mother-child bond in kinship. They argue that this assumption is rooted in naturalistic assumptions about women’s and men’s roles, in particular, their “natural” roles in sexual procreation. Rather than assuming the centrality of mother-child bond, I ask what cultural assumptions are at work in constructions of motherhood and fatherhood and what those mean for kinship and family formation. In this way, family formation and
reproductive choice happen at the level of the individual and of the couple, but as we will see, also at the levels of larger kin structures and political and cultural structures.

Conclusion

In this project, I use an intersectional approach to frame reproductive negotiation and family formation among middle-class heterosexual Latinos/as. This approach allows me to understand how ethnicity, gender, and class constrain and empower my participants’ choices. This occurs on the level of the nation-state, through stratified reproduction. However, it is also part of gendered relationships and negotiations in the couple and in the larger family. As I analyze reproductive narratives, I look at how concepts such as ethnicity, gender, and class are employed as part of one’s identity and the ways that participants portray themselves to the world through narrative work.
CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH CONTEXT

For this project, I needed to recruit middle-class heterosexual Latino/a couples, including voluntarily childless couples. These are smaller subpopulations that can be difficult to locate. I wanted to learn how Latino/a couples define parenting and voluntarily childless relationships and learn how couples negotiate family formation. Dallas/Fort Worth has various characteristics that allowed me to locate participants for this project. Dallas/Fort Worth (D/FW) is an interconnected metropolitan area and an economic and cultural hub in North Texas. It is a long-standing center of regional, national, and international trade as well as a major migration destination. It has had a rapidly growing immigrant population since 1990, with immigrant groups settling not only in city centers, but also in suburban areas. Though D/FW is a multiethnic metropolitan area, Latinos/as make up the largest minority group: about 28% of the area’s population (Dallas Regional Chamber 2016). The high percentage of Latinos/as and the economic growth in the area made it a perfect place to recruit middle-class Latinos/as. It is an area where there are established Latino/a families that have been able to build generational wealth as well as middle-class immigrants from Latin America who have moved to D/FW to work at the corporations headquartered in the area. As immigrant groups have settled in the suburbs as well as the city center, there are significant Latino/a communities across D/FW. However, there is a car culture in Dallas/Fort Worth, and people in the area are used to commuting for work as well as for social activities. This meant that some middle-class Latinos/as use networking groups to connect. These
networking groups provided the perfect setting to recruit participants based on class and ethnic identity, without introducing other bias (such as recruiting at a church). In short, Dallas/Fort Worth had a large enough population of Latinos/as and enough networking venues to recruit a hard-to-find sample for this project.

This chapter introduces the geographic and cultural contexts of my research. This will provide background information on the locations for my research and their histories in addition to situating it in social science research. Since there has been a great deal of research with Latinos/as in the United States, this chapter focuses on themes that are important to my project: gender, the middle class, and Dallas/Fort Worth. The chapter discusses important themes in research on Latinos/as in the United States, including historical context. It then turns to the social contexts of Latino/a reproduction in the United States. It discusses the United States as a pronatalist state and the discourses surrounding Latino/a reproduction. It frames this discussion with a historical example and grounds it with demographic trends of Latino/a reproduction. It then links discussions of immigration and birth rate in terms of American discourse.

Histories of Latinos/as

There are many ways to describe Latino/a presence and influence on the United States. A common starting point is the Treaty of Hidalgo (1848) at the end of the Mexican-American War. This is when the United States acquired its Southwest region, and with it, many Mexicans became Americans. This meant, in theory, that the residents of what is now the American Southwest would get all the protections of being a citizen of the United States; in practice, they often lost property and political and legal rights. Chavez (2012) argues that this is also the root of discriminatory laws and practices against Mexicans in the United States. Moreover, Anglo Texans saw *mestizo* Mexicans as a symbol of racial degradation and looked upon them as a
lesser class of people during the Mexican-American war, and these prejudices continued past the war (Foley 2014). Anglo cultural superiority was used to justify both official and unofficial acts of discrimination and racist attacks, including lynchings. For much of American history, the United States has relied on Mexican labor in particular, but Latino/a labor in general.

**Middle-class Latinos/as Have Always Existed**

There is a large and important scholarship in several disciplines tracing the histories of Latino/a migration to and from the United States. Of particular salience to my sample and research site is the history of Mexico-United States migration and settlement. This section benefits greatly from Vallejo’s (2012) history that shows the ebb and flow of Mexican-origin people across class backgrounds in the United States. The first wave of Mexican migration to the United States was in the early 20th century. The majority of these migrants were low-skilled workers, but there were also skilled professionals from a variety of vocations (e.g. teachers, lawyers, doctors) who migrated at this time (Garcia 1991). Eventually, middle-class Mexicans in the United States became tired of being marginalized, and LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) was founded in 1929, in part to differentiate themselves from lower-class Mexican Americans. They separated themselves from poor and less acculturated Mexican immigrants by limiting membership to United States citizens and emphasizing class status and English-language proficiency (Foley 1997; Orozco 2009). LULAC was the first organization to fight for Mexican American rights but did so based on the assertion that Mexicans should be considered white.

Attitudes in the United States about Mexican im/migration are related to American economic needs. During the Great Depression, there were efforts to deport Mexicans. Later, the Bracero Program (1942-1964) brought in poorly paid laborers from Mexico. After the Korean
War (1954), “Operation Wetback” sought to deport unauthorized workers but, in practice, also deported many American-born citizens; about 1.1 million Mexicans were deported in total (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). By the 1950s, most of the Mexican-origin population in the United States were grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants. They mostly lived in poor, segregated communities. However, there was also a small middle-class population. An important factor is that Latino soldiers returning from World War II were afforded educational opportunities that allowed them to move themselves and their families into the middle-class (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970). After World War II, returning Latino soldiers were proud of their service, but struck by the inequality they faced upon returning home (Oropeza n.d.). Community activists also started to frame mass deportations and cycles of scapegoating Mexican American immigrants as part of a larger system of exploitation. Most of these activists were American citizens, and many were middle-class, since these populations had the resources to do so (Gutiérrez 1995). This trajectory continued through the 1960s and early 1970s as the Chicano movement formed and gained traction, forming national civil rights organizations that still exist today (e.g. National Council of La Raza, now UnidosUS).  

For Vallejo’s (2012) research on the Mexican American middle class, the 1965 Immigration Act (Hart-Celler Act) was a particularly important historical moment. This act replaced the national-origin quota system with a system with three goals: to fill jobs with workers, to reunite families, and to allow for refugee immigration (Chiswick 2008). Mexican labor was still in high demand at this time, but temporary work visas were no longer allowed; there were also caps placed on migration from within the Western Hemisphere. This system started the era of large-scale unauthorized labor migration to the United States (Massey, Durand, Malone 2002).

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13 However, the section on D/FW will show that these changes took longer to manifest in Dallas.
and Malone 2002; Ngai 2004). Many of Vallejo’s participants’ parents migrated to the United States during this time period (1960s and early 1970s). She was surprised by the number of people who reported that their parents were able to obtain legal permanent residency because they had native-born children. Vallejo argues that permanent residency status was key for these immigrants in fast-tracking themselves and their families to the middle class because they were able to have steady employment.

United States immigration policies in the latter half of the twentieth century have resulted in high levels of unauthorized and low-wage Mexican migration to the United States14 (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Negative attitudes about Mexican immigrants in particular have persisted from that time, despite decreased immigration since the Great Recession in 2007-2009; during difficult economic periods, immigrants are often used as scapegoats. Mexican immigrants are portrayed as burdens on society and criminalized, in the creation of what Chavez (2013) refers to as the “Latino Threat Narrative.” However, Vallejo (2012) argues that these aggregate trends mask the progress of a relatively small, but significant, portion of Mexican Americans who are achieving middle-class status. For example, the economic downturn in Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s (an event several of my participants mentioned) caused many middle-class Mexicans to migrate to the United States (Hernández-León 2008).

**Histories of Latinos/as in Dallas/Fort Worth**

National immigration policy and political events in Mexico shaped Mexican migration to Dallas/Fort Worth, as it did in other parts of the Southwest. Much more has been written about Dallas than about Fort Worth, so by necessity, this section will emphasize Dallas. Mexicans began migrating to Dallas in large numbers in the railroad boom of the early 20th century (Adler

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14 Most notably, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act.
2005), with some arriving as early as the 1870s (Villasana 2011). The beginnings of the best known historical barrio in Dallas—Little Mexico, known at the times as La Colonia—trace back to this time, when Mexican immigrants settled in rail yards or in cheap rentals near the Eastern European Jewish neighborhood (Villasana 2011). The next surge of migration from Mexico to D/FW was primarily due to Mexicans fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution, and by the 1920s, Mexican Americans were a sizable ethnic minority in Dallas (Corchado and Trejo 1999). In Fort Worth, barrios developed around the various industries in the city: Mexican Americans primarily worked on the railroad and tended livestock during this time period. Fort Worth was also a marketplace for Mexican labor for Texas and the Southwest (Cuéllar 2004).

Despite these early settlements, Ravuri (2014) argues that Dallas only became a popular destination for Mexican immigration beginning in the 1950s. Graff (2008) estimates that the Mexican population in Dallas in 1960 was 30,000 people or less; not an impressive number. However, Achor (1978) argues that many Mexican immigrants came to and stayed in Dallas in the 1960s and 1970s because there were more resources available to them in the city than in rural Texas, and the cost of living was low. As a response to new policies in the United States in the 1980s, more undocumented Mexican immigrants began to stay in the United States, rather than going home after working in the United States for a time (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which provided amnesty to more than 3.1 million immigrants, most of whom were of Mexican-origin, served to solidify the presence of Mexican migrants in Dallas (Adler 2005). In fact, Latinos/as comprised almost one-fifth of the population of the City of Dallas by 1990, a significant increase from earlier decades (Brettell 2009).
In the early 2000s, in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, borders became more tightly guarded, making illegal border crossings even more dangerous and preventing return migration to Mexico (Cornelius and Salehyan 2007; Riosmena 2004). Even the economic downturn from 2007 to 2009 did not prompt return migration; instead, migrants waited for conditions to improve (Rendall, Brownell, and Kups 2011). In Dallas, the foreign-born population doubled between 1990 and 2000, and much of the increasing Latino/a population at this time was from migration (Brettell 2009). However, new estimates show declining numbers of undocumented migration after the Great Recession, and a statistically significant drop in 2015 (Passel and Cohn 2017). Nonetheless, Ravuri (2014) identifies Dallas/Fort Worth as an area with rapid growth in Mexican population since 1980, and as such, is a place warranting more research.

Kemper (2005) points out that D/FW now has a history as a migration destination (not just for Mexicans), and that it is a “multi-generational” destination. These flows and settlements of immigrants have impacted many areas of D/FW, both near city centers and in suburbs and periphery cities. Dallas/Fort Worth has also become a twenty-first-century gateway for immigration (Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2009). It is an “emerging gateway,” having experienced a rapidly growing immigrant population in the last twenty-five years. Moreover, beginning in the 1990s, immigrant groups were no longer only concentrating in urban areas near city centers, but were also starting to develop large communities in the suburbs. This was and is true of Dallas/Fort Worth as well.

Civil Rights, Racism, and Dallas

Dallas has historically not been a kind place to people of color, though this is a fact often ignored in the area and enforced by the dearth of scholarship exploring the topic (Phillips 2010).
This was a powerful tool to prevent coalitions from forming among disenfranchised groups in the city. In particular, there is a history of conflict between the Black and Latino/a communities in Dallas. The Ku Klux Klan was a highly visible and active presence in Dallas for a time after the Civil War. Around the time that the Mexican community was growing in Dallas after the Mexican Revolution (1920s), press accounts “describe long [KKK] marches through the city of robed and hooded figures carrying flaming torches and crosses” (Achor 1978, 63). In fact, in the 1920s, the Dallas KKK chapter was the largest in the country (Phillips 2010). At this time, the KKK was getting its members from a white middle class experiencing a decline in economic power (McVeigh 2001). From the 1930s to the 1970s, segregation in Dallas continued to intensify, with the Anglo population limiting housing and employment opportunities for Latinos/as and Blacks (Schutze 1986).

In the 1960s, civil rights reforms were spreading across the country, but were slow to take root in Dallas. Phillips (2010) argues that whiteness has always held a special currency in Dallas; racial categories were often fluid (especially for Mexican Americans), but success has always been closely aligned with a white identity. It is no wonder, then, that for Mexican Americans in Dallas in the 1950s and 1960s, there was immense pressure to try to obtain a white identity. Meanwhile in Fort Worth, there was intense racial segregation that lasted until the 1960s; Mexican Americans were confined to the barrios for fear of physical harm if they left them for a reason other than going to work (Cuéllar 2004). Achor (1978) notes the exclusion of minority voices in local politics in the 1960s and the stress this put on minority communities. It wasn’t until 1969 that the first Mexican American and first Black resident were elected to a formal city governing body, more than 100 years after Dallas was incorporated (Achor 1978). However, informal power structures were very important in Dallas at the time, and there was no
minority representation in the business elite who comprised these groups.\textsuperscript{15} Progress in local politics was even slower in Fort Worth, which did not have a Latino city councilman until 1977 and elected its first Latino into the school board of trustees in 1978 (Cuéllar 2004). By the 1970s, some spoke of Dallas as a “potential ‘racial powderkeg’” (Achor 1978).

The event that many consider a final push in getting Mexican American local leaders elected and including Mexican Americans on the police force in Dallas was the tragic death of twelve-year-old Santos Rodriguez (Achor 1978; Silverman 2013). A summer evening in 1973, police pulled Santos and his brother David from their home, accusing them of robbing a vending machine at a local gas station. They denied involvement, but were handcuffed, put in a police car, and taken to the gas station. Officer Darrel L. Cain had been moved to this beat because he shot and killed an eighteen-year-old African American in his previous neighborhood assignment. Cain tried to make the boys confess to the crime via Russian roulette. He loaded a bullet in his gun, put it to Santos’ head, and pulled the trigger. The second time, the gun fired, and Santos died in the back of a police car next to his thirteen-year-old brother, over a spurious accusation of stealing $8.\textsuperscript{16} Four days later, Mexican Americans (and later in the day, African Americans) gathered at City Hall for a protest that turned into a riot. A local historian estimates that there were around 80,000 Latinos/as in Dallas at the time, and that the community was in the early stages of establishing itself (as cited in Silverman 2013). This killing is what galvanized the

\textsuperscript{15} The Dallas Citizens Council was a powerful group of elites that determined who would be put into political office in the city for about 30 years, starting in 1935 (Phillips 2010). The group exists to this day, but no longer holds the same power and influence.

\textsuperscript{16} This incident unfortunately feels too current in the United States and in Dallas. In the Dallas area in May 2017, a white officer shot a rifle into a car full of Black teenagers leaving a house party. Fifteen-year-old Jordan Edwards was fatally shot in the head, next to his brothers, who were taken into custody. Most officers in this area are white, but most residents are not (Emily, Leszcynski, and Ramirez 2017). For me, there are chilling parallels between this case and the killing of Santos Rodriguez, boys of color killed by police over small incidents while confined in the back of a car, 44 years apart.
community politically. The police department started actively recruiting minorities to join the police force. In 1975, the Dallas police hired its first Latina officer (Silverman 2013). It was also around this time that Dallas began to desegregate its schools, and Latinos were able to win some school board seats. The Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 70s are still recent history in the United States but took even longer to take root in Dallas.

Latinos/as in the Contemporary United States

Latinos/as are currently the largest minority group in the United States. The 2010 Census estimates that 16.3% of the United States population is Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau 2012b). Census numbers often underestimate the presence of undocumented immigrants, so the proportion is likely larger. Of Latinos/as in the United States, the largest group by far is those of Mexican heritage, making up 10.3% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau 2012b). Contrary to the popular American assumption that Latinos/as are primarily immigrants, most Latinos/as (65%) were born in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). In fact, about as many people from Mexico are leaving the United States as are entering (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012). The Latino/a population in the United States is still growing, but is no longer the fastest growing population in the United States: Asians now have the highest growth rate (Stepler and Lopez 2016). Latino/a birth rates have steadily fallen since the United States Great Recession. Birth rates peaked at 98.3 births per 1,000 Hispanic women age 15 to 44 in 2006, but were 72.1 in 2014 (Hamilton et al. 2015).

Latinos/as in Dallas/Fort Worth

Like most of Texas, Latinos/as have greatly impacted the Dallas/Fort Worth area. D/FW is home to people of a variety of backgrounds and countries of origin, but it has a particularly large Latino/a population. Hispanics are the largest minority group in D/FW, making up 27.8%
of the population, compared to 49.4% Anglo (Dallas Regional Chamber 2016). Latinos/as are also the largest group of foreign-born residents in D/FW: 17.5% of D/FW is foreign-born, and almost 63% of those residents are from Latin America. In line with the rest of the region, the majority of the Latino/a population (84.3%) in Dallas-Fort Worth claims Mexican heritage (Pew Research Center 2016). Most growth in the Latino/a population in D/FW is from birth rate, though 37.8% of the Latino/a population was foreign-born in 2014 (Pew Research Center 2016). This differs by location in D/FW; in Dallas County, there is an exception to the rule, and there are more foreign-born Latinos/as than native born (Brettel 2008). None of this is particularly surprising for a metropolitan area in Texas. Texas has a Latino/a population of 10.4 million, making it the state with the second highest Latino/a population (after California) (Stepler and Lopez 2016). This project was conducted in a variety of neighborhoods across Dallas/Fort Worth. The only geographical limitation was that participants live in Dallas/Fort Worth, in an urban or suburban area. For this reason, precisely describing the field site is a challenge. I begin by orienting the reader to the Dallas/Fort Worth area in general, and then situating the areas where participants lived.

Where is Dallas/Fort Worth?

Dallas/Fort Worth (abbreviated D/FW and often referred to as “the Metroplex”) is an urban/suburban region in Northeastern Texas along the I-35 corridor. However, Texans refer to this area as “North Texas,” with “East Texas” to its east and the “Panhandle” to its west, including the actual northernmost area of the state. Since Texas is such a large state, these

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17 Some participants in Fort Worth jokingly “corrected” me that they live in Fort Worth/Dallas, as sometimes Fort Worth residents feel pushed aside in the Dallas/Fort Worth moniker.
18 The exact contours of these regions are the subject of much debate among Texans. For example, some would argue that Central Texas extends north and divides North Texas and the Panhandle. Moreover, these divisions are different than the ones employed by geographers.
differentiations are culturally meaningful to Texans. Some regions identify themselves more with
the American Southwest, and others with the South, and each region has its own associated
stereotypes and characteristics. Dallas and Fort Worth are the main economically important and
well-known cities in the area, about 30 miles apart. The area between the two cities is largely
suburban, and often referred to as the “midcities.19” D/FW is a rapidly growing area. From July
1, 2014 to July 1, 2015, it gained 144,704 people, resulting in a population of over 7.1 million
people: the second-largest population growth in the nation, just behind Houston, Texas (U.S.
Census Bureau 2016).

Robert Van Kemper (2005) argues that Dallas/Fort Worth has always had an
“international character.” It has been dominated by Anglo populations since the mid-nineteenth
century, got a boost from the railroads coming to the area in the 1870s, and obtained further
urban growth in the 1950s, as it hooked into the network of federal Interstate highways. In this
way, it was central to national and international transport systems; this role was heightened with
the construction of the D-FW International Airport in 1974. I-35 is a major route for the flow of
goods to and from Mexico, so NAFTA has contributed to the globalization of North Texas, and
the region also contains several federally-authorized Free Trade Zones. Moreover, many major
corporations call North Texas home, and this trend is only increasing.

Dallas and Fort Worth also have distinct personalities. Politically, Texas is largely
conservative. However, there is an urban/rural divide, with most Texas cities leaning liberal; the
exception is Fort Worth. There is no clear, singular reason why Fort Worth is different, but some
possible factors are that it is less diverse than other Texas cities and that many of its affluent
suburbs are counted as inside the city, rather than outside of it (as is the case in Dallas) (Brandon

19 That isn’t to say that there are not large cities in this area. For example, Arlington was the seventh
largest city by population in Texas in 2010 (TSL 2013).
Formby, Crostopher Connelly, and Alexa Ura 2017). Fort Worth residents often say it has more of a small-town feel than Dallas. They would never want to live in Dallas because it is too cold and too much like a big city; they like Fort Worth because they perceive it as friendlier.

Like most large cities, each neighborhood or suburb has its own characteristics as well. However, in D/FW, it is especially important to recognize segregation. Segregation by income in D/FW is some of the highest among large United States metropolitan areas; there are fewer mixed-income or middle-income neighborhoods than in other major metropolitan areas, and the trend has intensified over time (Fry and Taylor 2012). However, this analysis also argues that residential segregation by race is still stronger than by income in the United States. When the Pew Research Center (Huynh and Kent 2015) looked at D/FW, they found that majority upper-income areas were a whopping 95% white households, and majority mixed-income or middle-income households (mostly suburban areas) were 76% white, while majority low-income areas were 83% non-white households. The maps below (Huynh and Kent 2015) clearly show correlations between race and income in the D/FW area:
In Dallas Metro Area, Households Tend to be Segregated by Race, Income

Census tracts where a majority of households are headed by non-Hispanic whites are more likely to be majority upper-income.

Upper Income

Lower Income

Note: In Dallas, lower-income households are defined as those with annual incomes of less than $38,000 in 2010; upper-income households are those with annual incomes of at least $113,000. Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington metro area is not shown in its entirety.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2008-2010 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year files.

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Figure 1: Segregation by Race and Income in D/FW
Latino/a Neighborhoods in Dallas/Fort Worth

There were a number of Mexican American *barrios* in Dallas through the 1970s. A local Mexican American historical society (DMAHL) committed to preserving their history identifies eighteen such *barrios*. These areas were (and to an extent still are) neglected by the city. In the 1950s, fewer than 10% of the “flimsy dwellings” in West Dallas had running water, and infectious disease was a significant issue (Phillips 2010). Achor (1978) documents the poor living conditions in one of the *barrios* in the late 1970s, and there are still areas of Oak Cliff where neighborhood streets are dirt roads. Barrios in Fort Worth originally formed around industries where im/migrant Mexicans were employed.

More recently, Kemper (2005) identifies a variety of Latino/a neighborhoods in Dallas/Fort Worth:

The traditional "Little Mexico" section of northwest Dallas has been surpassed by much larger concentrations of Hispanics in Oak Cliff (on the southern side of the Trinity River), in the Bachman-Walnut Hill neighborhoods in northwest Dallas, and in East Dallas. Substantial enclaves of Hispanics also are found in Irving, Grand Prairie, Arlington, Fort Worth, Carrollton, Richardson, Garland, and Mesquite. These days, numerous immigrants from other Latin American countries, especially El Salvador, have established enclaves in the Metroplex. […] Indeed, very few communities in the region seem to be immune from the growing presence of the Hispanic population; the few exceptions to date are small, affluent towns such as Highland Park and University Park in the Dallas area, Colleyville in the Mid-Cities area, and Benbrook in the Fort Worth area. (135-7)

Kemper’s description still holds true, with a few additions. The 2010 Census showed only 1% population growth in Dallas but a change in its composition; the Latino/a population is growing, and more Black residents are moving to other cities in North Texas. Further, much of the Hispanic growth is happening in neighborhoods that were once predominantly Black (Kalthoff

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20 Similarly, conditions in South Dallas---a largely Black population---are poor. In 2016, a woman was mauled to death by a pack of the dogs who roam loose in that area of the city, unchecked by Dallas Animal Control, despite repeated calls from residents (Mervosh 2016).
In general, Mexican immigrants settle predominantly in and around the urban cores of Dallas and Fort Worth, with another heavy concentration in the midcities area (Brettell 2009). Salvadorans, the second largest Latino/a group in the region, have predominantly settled in Dallas and some of the suburbs closer to Dallas, where there are also Mexican suburban settlements. The growth of the Latino/a population in D/FW, however, has not occurred without conflict.

A notable example of friction caused by changing demographics are the attempts to encode anti-immigrant (in particular, anti-Mexican) sentiment into law in Farmers Branch, Texas (Brettell and Nibbs 2008, 2011). Farmers Branch is a suburb of Dallas that historically had a low proportion of foreign-born residents; but by 2005, foreign-born residents made up 28% of the population, and in 2000, Farmers Branch had a larger proportion of Latinos/as than Dallas or Fort Worth (Sandoval 2008). Starting in 2006, a city council member (who would later be elected mayor), publicly blamed the city’s problems on undocumented immigrants and began proposing anti-immigrant measures to limit undocumented immigrants’ ability to live in the city. There were a variety of proposed measures, but the heart of the effort was a measure that would require renters to prove immigration status to their landlords. Farmers Branch tried to enact this measure (and modified versions of it) and faced years of lawsuits from various groups. The saga continued through March 2014 when the United States Supreme Court declined to review the case; a lower court had declared the ordinance illegal, so that ruling would stand. The city spent $6.1 million in legal expenses with an additional $2 million in pending charges at the time of the Supreme Court decision (Solis 2014). That is not to say that all North Texas suburbs are reacting to changing demographics in this way. For example, Plano’s population also changed rapidly
during this time, with a dramatic growth in its foreign-born population, but responded with inclusionary measures (Brettell and Nibbs 2008).

Another developing change for the Latino/a population of the Metroplex is the gentrification of the largely Hispanic areas of West Dallas and Oak Cliff (both West of the Trinity River). This area opened to settlement by minorities in the 1960s and 1970s because of Civil Rights reforms, resulting in white flight from the area (Elliott, Summey, and Kokel 2009). Of course, gentrification here is not by accident. The City of Dallas built the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge across the Trinity River in order to connect Downtown Dallas (and points North) to West Dallas. It is an architectural bridge, topped with a large white arch, tall enough to insert itself into the Dallas skyline. The bridge was completed in 2012, and in 2014 the city completed construction on a park and pedestrian area on the old bridge. Families from West Dallas and also those from North Dallas use this space frequently. Subsequently, sections of Oak Cliff and West Dallas have undergone significant gentrification; trendy restaurants and shops have sprung up, and young, affluent white people are moving to the area. In both Oak Cliff and West Dallas, there is a core where trendy restaurants, shops, and condos have sprung up, and each core is surrounded by poor, largely Latino/a neighborhoods. It is unclear what direction the city will take in addressing this change. In a racially segregated city that has had issues complying with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Schutze 2017b), some fear the pattern may follow what happened in the Uptown area (Schutze 2017a).

Historically, Uptown was the heart of the North Dallas African American community, but through a process supported by local government, it was gentrified by affluent whites around the turn of the 21st century (Prior and Kemper 2005). This area was established by former slaves in 1869 and known as Freedman’s Town. The community was segregated by necessity, but
nonetheless thrived. By the 1920s, whites started to leave the area, and middle- and upper-class African Americans started buying their houses. Due to segregation, the area became overcrowded and structures were deteriorating (and Dallas was slow to install city infrastructure). In 1942, a housing development, Roseland Homes, was installed; it enhanced living conditions for many, but also displaced many home owners who were hard-pressed to find new homes. Some tried to buy homes in white areas, which resulted in mob violence and fire-bombings (Payne 1994). A major freeway (Central Expressway) was built through the community in 1949, replacing the railway; it physically split the community in two and caused residents and business owners to be evicted. Beginning in the 1970s, the African American community was leveled and dispersed; with the cooperation of the city government, the area was developed for an affluent white population.

It is clear why some community leaders fear that history may repeat itself in West Dallas and Oak Cliff. Latino/a residents generally do not want to move from this area; some people’s yards even have signs proclaiming: “We’re Staying! Nos Quedamos!” Because the rental market in Dallas is so competitive and Section 8 Vouchers are extremely difficult to use—60% of the Dallasites with vouchers cannot find a landlord who accepts vouchers—it is unclear how they will be able to find affordable housing as their neighborhoods are gentrified, even if residents were looking to move (Sullivan 2017).21 There is great tension between landlords in the area and local government as to the best way to proceed (Schutze 2017A). There have already been mass evictions of long-time residents (Solis 2016), and more condos are under construction.

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21 Many argued that these racial and socioeconomic divides were at play in the nationally-reported instance of a police officer appearing to use excessive force on a Black teenage girl at an end-of-year school party in an affluent suburb (McKinney) North of Dallas in summer 2015.
Where My Participants Live

By and large, participants in my study live in middle- or upper-middle class neighborhoods. Only a few participants live in the neighborhoods where they grew up; these participants live in neighborhoods that are largely Hispanic, and their family and friends live nearby. For those who have family in the Metroplex, they almost certainly have family who live in those areas. Moreover, many were raised in traditionally Latino/a areas of town. For example, Irene, who we will meet later in the dissertation, is doing significant care work for her mother, who is sick, sometimes even staying at her house; we met at her mother’s house for interviews, in a traditionally Hispanic part of Dallas. However, for Irene, the house is not her preferred location. She doesn’t like that the house is old, and that it was never updated to have central air conditioning. She prefers her newer house in a newer neighborhood.

A few voluntarily childless participants live in townhomes an upper-middle class area of North Dallas, Uptown. It is an area often described as attracting “young professionals,” a term that is often race- and class-coded: people in their 20s and 30s who work in white-collar jobs, do not yet have children, and (though not necessarily white) tend to project beauty and fashion ideals of the white upper-middle class as part of their presentation and identities. It is an area modeled after the idea of “new urbanism,” where buildings are densely packed, and the area is highly walkable (a rarity in car-culture Texas). These participants consider themselves to be urbane and enjoy living in a sophisticated area. A few of the other voluntarily childless couples in my sample also live in North Dallas and identified with living in the city.

Those voluntarily childless couples who live in North Dallas are in contrast to some of the parent couples who live in the midcities or in suburbs of Dallas and Fort Worth. These parents often live in tract housing developments outside of the city, where there are relatively
inexpensive, fairly large homes. Only one voluntarily childless couple in my sample lives in this kind of housing development. Based on my observations from spending time in these neighborhoods, they tend to be racially diverse. They are not primarily Hispanic neighborhoods, nor were the people I saw out walking their dogs, doing yardwork, etc. primarily Anglo. People who live in these areas often commute into Dallas, Fort Worth, or Arlington to work.

Both voluntarily childless and parent couples live in suburbs of Dallas and Fort Worth. Dallas, in particular, has been growing rapidly, and cost of living within the city has been rising in recent years. So in addition to some people’s preferences for living farther away from a city center, it often makes economic sense to do so. In Texas cities, urban sprawl is the rule, rather than the exception. Cars are considered a necessity to move around the city, and professionals often commute to work. Most of Dallas and Fort Worth have some public transportation, with a train linking the two cities, but much of the midcities and many of the suburbs do not have public transportation. There are a litany of logistical issues that make having effective, usable public transportation difficult—if not impossible—to implement. Further, in some of these areas, residents who oppose expanding public transportation fear it will “bring crime” to the neighborhood, which those who support expanding public transportation interpret as coded racism.

In Caroline Brettell’s (2008) study on migration to Dallas/Fort Worth, she traces the rise in immigration to this area that occurred in primarily in the 1990s and the accompanying rapid change in D/FW from a triethnic urban metropolis to a multiethnic urban metropolis. Though I have focused on the role of Latinos/as in D/FW, immigrants from a variety of places have set up enclaves in urban and suburban D/FW, resulting in a culturally diverse landscape. Moreover, immigrant groups in the 1990s began settling in suburban areas as well as the city centers. In her
research on place-making, Brettell asks how an immigrant population can be understood as a community if they are geographically spread out, not necessarily living in the same neighborhoods. Brettell employs Zelinsky and Lee’s (1998) concept of heterolocalism, when groups with a shared ethnic identity manage to remain cohesive despite a dispersed residential pattern.

I located participants in my study through Latina professional networking groups. The middle-class Latinos/as in my study utilize the Latina professional networking groups as a place to explicitly create and reinforce community ties. Though participants are spread throughout the Metroplex, they utilize symbols and practices of their identity in their meetings and actions. They meet at restaurants serving Latin foods and have book clubs supporting Latino/a authors. And they all explicitly mobilize the identity of Hispanic or Latino/a to help Latinas. This is a way to give back to the community, for example, through fundraising for college scholarships for Latino/a youth. It is also a way to engage with larger business and educational communities to make them more friendly spaces for Latinos/as. They are creating explicitly Latino/a networks as a tactic for increasing Latino/a representation in professional spaces. Moreover, members in these groups often participate in cultural and charitable events in D/FW, either through the networking group or as individuals. Their active email listservs are a space where this information is dispersed.

Social Science Research with Latinos/as in the United States

Latinos/as are a much-studied population in the United States; a full review of the literature would be a book unto itself. The goal of this section is to highlight some key themes and findings about Latinos/as from anthropological and sociological literature that relate to this project. For this reason, there are key works on undocumented immigrants (Chavez 2012),
identity (Massey and Sanchez 2010), health (Hirsch 2003; Holmes 2013), and the second
generation (Smith 2006) that do not fit here. Key subject areas in the literature that inform my
research are gender and immigration; education and upward mobility; and the 1.5 generation,
second generation, and beyond. I focus on gender and immigration and education and upward
mobility here, as both themes highlight literature on Latinos/as born in the United States as well.

**Gender and Immigration**

Gender has been a key theme in studies of United States-Mexico immigration since the
1990s. In particular, Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (1994) *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of
Immigration* pushed social scientists to start examining gender’s role in immigration.
Hondagneu-Sotelo argues for the importance of negotiations in families and social networks as
an impetus for im/migration. She also illustrates how lifestyles change after immigration and the
important roles that women play in their new communities. More recently, Hondagneu-Sotelo
(2013) argues that gender is still not sufficiently attended to in scholarship on immigration, even
as immigration scholarship has blossomed.

A related literature that has emerged is about relationships between immigration and
was a transformative book on sexuality and migration from Mexico. Gonzalez-Lopez studied
heterosexual couples’ sex lives, and how they feel about them, as part of their experiences of
immigration; this data informed her discussion of how power structures organize Mexican
American women’s lives. She found that due to regional patriarchies in Mexico, women often
use their virginity as social capital to improve their living conditions. However, after settling in
the United States, women reshape their sexual lives and renegotiate gender dynamics with their
sexual partners. It was significant research because much of the literature on sexuality and migration focuses on queer or gay men (e.g. Epstein and Carrillo 2014).

Many researchers document how women and men experience the immigration process from Latin America to the United States as gendered beings. Descriptions of gender and immigration typically highlight the complexity and interconnectedness of men’s and women’s experiences (Boehm 2012; Schmalzbauer 2014; Dreby and Schmalzbauer 2013). A central theme in this literature is gender and work. Some studies illustrate changing gendered occupational niches, such as Mexican immigrant men’s employment in suburban maintenance gardening (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009). However, wage work can be difficult to obtain for Latinas (Flippen 2014) or, if obtained, often affects women’s gender identities and roles in complicated ways that can reinforce traditional gender roles (Schmalzbauer 2011; Flippen and Parrado 2015). The literature also highlights how migration policies are gendered, such as United States deportations disproportionately targeting Latino working men (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013).

Immigration also affects families and family formation. Hondagneu-Sotelo has also been influential in this literature. Along with Avila (1997), they coined the term “transnational motherhood,” finding that Mexican women working as nannies and domestics in the United States while their children remain in Mexico transform meanings of motherhood to cope with their situation. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) further elucidates this theme by detailing relationships between Mexican and Central American women working as nannies and domestic workers in Los Angeles and the women who employ them. Taking a slightly different tact, Chang’s (2016) Disposable Domestics is another influential text; she argues that United States foreign policies,
migration, domestic immigration, and welfare policies all work in concert to maintain low-wage and easily exploitable women workers.

The topic of family and migration is often shaped by emotional labor, affect, and policy (e.g. Parson 2010). Boehm (2012) develops the concept of “intimate migrations” to describe the experiences of undocumented Mexican migrants to the United States; their movements are always constrained by the State, but are also shaped by gendered and familial intimate relationships. Immigrant children in the United States typically worry about family stability, no matter their family members’ immigration status, since they do not fully understand legal issues (Dreby 2012). Some recent studies focus on immigrant fathers. They are likely to undertake emotional labor and experience changing gender subjectivities as they move back and forth between the United States and Mexico (Schmalzbauer 2015). Moreover, when Salvadoran fathers are deported from the United States, they are often motivated to return to the United States to reunite with a child (Berger Cardoso et al. 2016). A particularly difficult family arrangement is when children are left behind in Latin America so that their parents can migrate to the United States in hopes of better providing for them. There is a structural context that creates and sustains this system (Abrego 2014). Undocumented migration is so difficult that parents’ migration often isn’t as financially beneficial as they wish, but it does serve to reinforce family members’ commitments to each other (Dreby 2010).

**Education and Upward Mobility**

Another theme in the literature on Latin American/United States migration that informs this project is studies of the work force and education. In particular, scholars are interested in challenges Latinos/as in the United States face in becoming upwardly mobile: what structural forces limit their movement and how do those who are successful overcome them? This literature
addresses this question through several avenues. It looks at policies in the United States, experiences in school, and difficulties in higher education. Structural limitations often occur in concert, so there is significant overlap in these approaches. Moreover, research often discusses ways that individuals cope with these structural limitations.

Part of this literature focuses on the effects of policies in the United States. Massey and Pren (2012) name a “New Latino Underclass,” following a string of legislation that results in Latino/a immigrants as undocumented but also subject to increasing sanctions from authorities and negative pressure from the public; this maintains a low status for Latinos/as and negatively effects their well-being. In the rural South, Latino/a immigrants have some opportunities for upward mobility, but opportunities are constrained for many by their legal status (Marrow 2011). However, it is important to consider more than immigration policy. For example, a result of the 1996 Welfare Reform in the United States is that women on public assistance must go up against difficult odds in dead-end jobs; the impacts of this on Mexican-American woman has been documented (Marchevsky and Theoharis 2006).

Experience and obstructions for Latino/a children in school is another area of inquiry. Studies find that home life is an important mitigating factor for Latino/a children. Students may develop “socially neutral operating identities” to navigate new settings; these are developed with support of family, mentors, and school opportunities (Smith 2008). For undocumented children, those with personal and environmental protective factors do better in school (Perez et al. 2009). Further, public ethnic regard and resilience to barriers are linked to college-going self-efficacy (Gonzalez, Stein, and Huq 2013). Most of the studies in this category include discussions of policy and structural factors and their impact on education, but some studies primarily focus on structural issues. Immigration and education policies are especially salient forces for
undocumented youth (Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Bean et al. 2011). Moreover, for Mexican and Central American youth in a California barrio, poor school infrastructure and racist assumptions by teachers are obstacles to education, despite families placing high value on education for their children (Cammarota 2016).

There is also a related literature following Latino/a young adults as they go to college. Similar to younger Latinos/as, second-generation Latinos/as in their early careers are able to achieve mobility through parental support, mentors, and bilingualism (Morando 2013). Much of the research focuses on the effect of policies on the ability of Latinos/as to complete college education. DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) has reduced some challenges for undocumented young adults, but those with higher levels of education and community resources have benefited the most (Gonzales, Terriquez, and Ruszczynski 2014). Similarly, state level policies are analyzed. California Assembly Bill 540 gives undocumented immigrant students in-state tuition rates, which increases access to higher education, not only because of lessened cost but also because of lessened stigma (Abrego 2008). However, policies also limit Latino/a upward mobility. Undocumented youth in the United States typically have access to public education through high school, but legal and economic barriers can prevent them from obtaining higher education (Abrego 2006). 1.5 generation Latinos/as are often constrained by the biopolitics of citizenship and governmentality, which can create internalized fear and immobility (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). When unauthorized parents obtain legal status, second-generation children are able to complete schooling at rates similar to those whose parents arrived as documented immigrants (Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015).
Gender, Education, and Immigration

Themes of gender and access to education for immigrants from Latin America inform the case of middle-class Latinos/as. Though many of the studies above explain how family and social networks are important for Latinos/as, it is important to note that this is not a strategy without consequences. Most notably, Menjívar (2000) shows that for families or communities in poverty, it can be difficult for them to accumulate enough resources to help one another. However, many of the participants in my study are part of the group of Latinos/as who were able to achieve upward mobility, so these studies provide context for their life histories. Further, this project interrogates Latinos/as’ gendered experiences, and many of my participants are immigrants who describe differences between their home countries and the United States at length. In short, these themes provide background for understanding the Latino/a middle class in the United States.

Middle-class Latinos/as

Many of my participants count themselves as upwardly mobile; they grew up poor (some immigrants, some not) and have successfully pursued education or business prospects to enter the middle class as adults. In this way, this project expands on the existing literature on Latino/a immigrants. Further, some scholars argue the importance of understanding more about middle-class Latinos/as. Scholarship on Latinos/as has reinforced stereotypes about the population, obfuscating some of its variation. Moreover, ignoring the Latino/a middle class in the literature sends the message that Latinos/as will never become part of the middle class (Vallejo 2012). Middle-class Latinos/as are not the majority of Latinos/as, but may be a larger group than the average American imagines. The 2010 census can give us some insight (U.S. Census Bureau 2012b). For Latinos/as over 25, almost 21% have at least some college education or an
associate’s degree, and about 66% have at least a high school diploma. Of employed Latino/a civilians over 16, 9% work in “management, professional, and related occupations,” while 10% work in sales and office occupations, all occupations associated with white-collar employment.\textsuperscript{22} As described in the previous chapter, measuring socioeconomic class by income alone is problematic. However, it can help to orient us. About 43% of Latino/a family households have a combined income of $50,000 or more. As previously discussed, census data likely under-represents undocumented workers, and employment and income information likely excludes those who work on a cash basis. However, census data does demonstrate that a substantial minority of middle-class Latinos/as exists. Moreover, Vallejo (2012) argues that when data is desegregated by generation since immigration, each generation demonstrates more educational attainment. Her study also demonstrates that access to mentors and educational opportunities is the key to upward mobility for Latinos/as, so her work argues that the Latino/a middle class will continue to expand.

Vallejo’s work (2016; 2009, 2015), in particular her (2012) monograph, is the only ethnographic account of middle-class Latinos/as that I have found. Further, there is not literature focusing on their home and family lives, though Vallejo (2012) does include some of this information in her ethnography. Instead, the literature centers on middle-class Latinos/as’ experiences in the professional sphere. Social scientists are primarily interested in how and why Latinos/as are able to move into the middle class, what issues they face in the workplace, and if they are abandoning their ethnic identities as they gain economic success. In many ways, these studies are the mirror image of my project. I am interested in how middle-class Latinos/as are building their families, and also spoke to them about their work experiences.

\textsuperscript{22} About 27% work in “service occupations,” some of which may include middle-class occupations, but it is impossible to know.
There are very few book-length works on middle-class Latinos/as written by social scientists. I was able to locate three books: two written by sociologists and the other by a political scientist. Two rely heavily on survey data, which is supported by some qualitative interviews; the other is ethnographic. Chávez (2011), a political scientist, worked with Latino/a lawyers in Washington State as a case study of Latino/a professionals in America. Chávez found that Latino/a lawyers were most commonly second-generation Americans but that Latino/a professionals continue to be marginalized, including in a professional setting. Most cite their desire to give back to the Latino/a community as a key reason for getting into (and staying in) the law.

The second book-length work is Schleef and Cavalcani’s (2010) sociological study of Latinos/as in Richmond, Virginia; their interest is studying an ethnic group in an area where there is not a history of coethnic settlement. They also write that many immigrants from Latin America to the American South are middle-class professionals, so their study modifies our idea that Latino/a immigrants are only undocumented workers. They found an element of shared Latino/a identity among Latinos/as of all classes, in particular: ethnic identity as Hispanic, the importance of preserving Latino/a culture, and the need to resist pressures of larger society. They find that those who are well-educated and speak English have more options when moving to a new community in the United States, but their mobility may lower the importance of familismo.

Jody Aguis Vallejo’s (2012) book Barrios to Burbs is the only ethnography I have located on middle-class Latinos/as. She argues that a consistent issue in research on Latinos/as is lack of attention paid to class, so her work in Southern California with 1.5 generation to fourth generation Mexican Americans pays close attention to class. Her work shows that there are a variety of pathways to the middle class for Mexican Americans; the process is much more
complicated than just becoming white. An important division is if the participant grew up in a lower-income family (the majority of her participants) or a middle-class family, but almost all participants lived in white-majority neighborhoods, had parents who expected them to go to college, and reported experiencing discrimination because of their ethnicity. Those raised in lower-income families tend to maintain close relationships with extend kin, give back extensively to kin networks, struggle to navigate some white middle-class spaces, and closely relate to their family’s immigrant narrative. Those raised in middle-class families tend to have less contact with extended kin, expect family giving to be unidirectional (parent to child), are more easily able to relate to middle-class whites (and thus be more comfortable in those spaces), and do not draw from an immigrant narrative.

**Latina Professionals**

There is a growing literature on Latina professionals (Chávez 2011). They are often of particular interest because they face both racism and sexism in the workplace. Therefore, most work on the topic uses a framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991)—that is, paying methodological and analytical attention to particular experiences of Latinas. Much of this literature asks why white women have made great strides in the workplace since civil rights and the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, but women of color have lagged behind.

Many studies found that Latina professionals feel isolated and feel like tokens in their workplace. Flores (2011) finds this to be true among Latina teachers when they are the minority in their school, but Latina teachers in largely Latina-staffed schools have a much more positive work experience; for this reason, integrated and diverse schools are not a desirable goal for them. Latina attorneys feel Othered and isolated, not only by white men and women in the workforce,

23 A common assumption in the sociological literature on assimilation.
but also by Latino men (García-López 2008). Latina professors also feel isolated and without a support network (Medina and Luna 2000). Structural barriers are an important reason for the isolation professional Latinas feel at work, and also function to limit their success. Organizational practices in law firms reinforce racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia, which limit opportunities for professional advancement of Latina attorneys (García-López 2008; Chávez 2011). Structural barriers create discomfort for Latinas in managerial and professional positions by creating subtle discrimination against them, resulting in offices where a Latina professional may be the only woman of color (Hite 2007). Moreover, some studies (Medina and Luna 2000; Flores 2011) find that Latinas have an extra work load over their co-workers.

The desire to give back to Latino/a communities or kin networks or to enact change that can benefit Latinos/as is a common reason professional Latinas give for continuing down an often difficult and lonely professional path. The professors in Medina and Luna’s (2000) study see themselves as training more teachers, paying their success forward. Similarly, Latina white-collar workers in a university are often happiest when they were helping Latino/a students (Segura 1992). Latina attorneys in García-López’s (2008) study re-define success outside of a white, male, middle-class framework. Attorneys in this study feel successful when they are available to the Latino/a community.

The literature also highlights motherhood and family/work balance, recalling the general literature on women and work. However, in the literature on Latinas, a cultural spin is often employed. Segura (1992) argues that Latina white-collar workers in a university are enacting gender in their work activities. For example, in assisting Latino/a students, they are expressing their Mexican culture through caregiving work. Success for García-López’s (2008) Latina attorneys includes work-life balance. Hite (2007) focuses on the “work-family values” of
managerial Latinas in her analysis. Chávez (2011) asserts that there are additional obstacles in culture and community for Latina lawyers because they face distinct family obligations and rigid gender roles.

**Latino/a Professionals**

More recently, research has come to focus on Latinos/as in a variety of professional roles. Latinos/as are underrepresented in professional occupations (Chávez 2011). The intersectional work discussed above is important for understanding why Latinas haven’t caught up with white women’s progress in professional jobs, but does not address why Latinos/as as a group are still underrepresented in a variety of professional settings. Vallejo and Canizales (2016) take a step beyond this goal and employ intersectionality to explore relationships among race, ethnicity, and gender in their study of Latino/a business owners in Los Angeles. They find that ethnicity is most significant for shaping men’s business ownership experiences, while race and gender are more salient for women. The literature is also expanding to document a variety of workplaces. Latino/a environmental professionals experience isolation and loneliness in their positions, and though Latinos/as have a strong, common environmental identity (how a person connects with environments through personal experiences), it hasn’t been enacted in outreach to Latinos/as (De la Hoz 2016). Other work interrogates American business culture (Cruz and Blancero 2016), studies Latino/a lawyers (Chávez 2011) and documents the growing population of middle-class Latino/a business owners (Vallejo and Canizales 2016).

Latino/a professionals often turn to Latino-focused professional groups for support. Chavez (2011) finds this for lawyers, and Cruz and Blancero (2016) finds this among Latinos/as navigating American business culture. This theme was also highlighted in Vallejo’s (2009; 2016) work with a professional Latina organization. In all of these cases, Latino/a groups not only
provide support, but also help with strategies for navigating business cultures that are predominantly white. Mexican Americans from poor backgrounds in a white-collar environment experience racism more often than those from middle-class backgrounds, and often use the strategy of joining a Latino-focused professional group to find support (Vallejo 2015).

**Ethnographies of Mexicans in Dallas**

There have been a handful of book-length ethnographies of Mexicans in Dallas, and some articles as well. However, there are no ethnographies that I could find about Latinos/as in Fort Worth. Further, the most recent published ethnographic work about Latinos/as in the Metroplex is from 2005.²⁴ That is not to say that Latinos/as in D/ FW are being uniquely ignored. As previously discussed, North Texas is in many ways an under-studied city (Kemper 2005). Further, there is more narrowly-focused social science work among Mexicans in North Texas on a variety of topics: transportation (Kemper et al. 2007), as a way to test assessment of *familismo* (Smith-Morris 2007; Smith-Morris et al. 2013), local immigration policy (Brettell and Nibbs 2011, 2008), as a new immigration gateway (Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2009), and higher education (Alexander et al. 2007). However, there is an special issue of the journal *Urban Anthropology* (2005) devoted to Dallas/Fort Worth that includes some ethnographic detail, with several contributions focusing on Latinos/as in Dallas (Adler 2005; Prior and Kemper 2005), Denton (Re Cruz 2005) and Fort Worth (Horsfall 2005).

North Texas is a receiving community for a variety of locations in Mexico. In particular, Adler (2005) found evidence of significant populations in Dallas from many Mexican states: Guanajuato, Yucatan, San Luis Potosi, Hidalgo, Durango, Guerrero, Zacatecas, and Aguascalientes. Dallas/Fort Worth is the oldest receiving community for Guanajuato, and more

²⁴ Lisa Haayen’s dissertation on friendship among Mexican youth in a diverse Dallas neighborhood is much more recent (2016).
Guanajuantenses live in Dallas/Fort Worth than in some northern parts of the state of Guanajuato (Gonzalez 2001). However, many more men than women migrate to Texas. The men work mostly in brick laying or carpentry, but some also work as gardeners in golf courses and as street and office cleaners; women typically work as house cleaners, in care work, or as janitors. Similarly, Northern Yucatan is a sending community for Dallas, and many migrants from Yucatan live in the Oak Lawn area (Adler 2004, 2005). Of these Yucatecans, men typically work in the restaurant and hotel industries; women are less commonly employed, but usually work as domestics when they are.

Not all Dallas Latino/a communities are comprised primarily of immigrants or of people from the same sending state. Denton, TX is a city just North of Dallas with a large university, but a Latino/a population that is “invisible” to Anglos because it is dispersed (Re Cruz 2005). The founding family of the Latino/a community in Denton arrived from Corpus Christi, Texas in the 1960s, but Re Cruz does not identify a primary sending community for immigrants to Denton. There are, however, communities of more settled immigrants and communities of more recent immigrants. Re Cruz argues that there has been socioeconomic mobility among the Latinos/as in Denton in a short time period. In the early 1990s, common jobs for Latinos were manual labor positions, including paving roads and in construction. By the early 2000s, they were also operating heavy machinery, managing businesses, and worked in city and county government offices. Further, Mexican Americans in the Metroplex are not necessarily recent immigrants. Even in Achor’s (1978) research in a Dallas barrio in the early 1970s, 90% of the Mexican Americans in the barrio were born in the United States, and she was familiar with third and fourth generation families. Most men in her study worked outside of the barrio, and less than
half of the women did—partly because of cultural pressure, but also for practical reasons such as lack of transportation.

These ethnographic accounts also provide a glimpse into gender roles and norms in Mexican communities in the Metroplex. It is common for men to migrate to Dallas first, and then to send for their families after they are settled (Adler 2004), or to participate in circular migration, where men work in the United States for a time to earn money, then go home for a time, only to repeat the cycle (Gonzalez 2001). The number of women who migrate from Guanajuato—where many men participate in circular migration—is increasing; they typically see the move as an opportunity for upward mobility for themselves and their children (Gonzalez 2001).

If women have little education or English skills, they may be isolated after migration. With constrained options, they are more vulnerable to abuse or violence from husbands or male employers. However, if they are documented immigrants and have job skills, women in this community often have more opportunities and thrive, working in a variety of industries or starting a small business. Re Cruz (2005) pays special attention to Hispanic women’s experience of changing gender dynamics after immigration to Denton, TX. Women in her study participate in the formal and informal economies, and there are many female-headed households in her sample. She posits that participation in consumer culture and conversion to Protestantism help drive women’s desire to generate an income. They also maintain social networks within their immediate community and in a transnational space. Some of these themes are echoed in Adler’s (2004) work; immigrant women in Dallas often work (which they would not have done in Mexico), but they are often unable to find work, in part because women working as domestics cannot network for jobs and work in groups as the men can in the restaurant industry. Women do
not work in restaurants, Adler argues, because of cultural constraints and the gendered structure of the workforce. Further, employed women in Dallas are likely to still be responsible for the household, resulting in a double day of work.

Ethnographic research on Mexicans in Dallas echo the larger themes in the literature on Latinos/as in the United States. These studies focus on poor and working-class Mexicans from a variety of sending states in Mexico and those born in the United States, with different immigration/citizenship statuses in differing parts of the city. They do not directly reflect the population I am working with: middle-class Latinos/as (mostly, but not exclusively, with Mexican heritage). However, they do provide background on the general ethnographic setting of Latinos/as in D/FW, and reflect many of my participants’ childhoods, as many of them grew up in a poor Latino/a family or in Latin America.

Reproduction in the United States

An important context for this research are the practical realities and cultural assumptions about fertility in the United States. This section discusses the realities of the United States as a pronatalist state and then narrows in on how this affects Latinos/as in general, but Latinas in particular. Reproduction has been employed as an important site to understand social theory and cultural politics since the 1990s (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Rapp 2001). My project engages with this intellectual history in a variety of ways, but most the notable in this section is the study of population control; women’s reproduction occurs in a context of state involvement. Then, this section attends to the politics of Latina reproduction in the United States, including representations of Latina fertility (Chavez 2004; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995).
The United States as Pronatalist State

The United States is generally understood as a pronatalist state (Gillespie 2000; Lamastro 2001; Lampman and Dowling-Guyer 1995; Petropanagos 2017). Simply put, a pronatalist state is one where reproduction and childbirth are encouraged. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but is generally reflected in state policy and law. An extreme example of pronatalism was the outlawing of birth control, including abortion, in Romania during Ceausescu’s reign (mid-1960s to 1980s) (Kligman 1995). The policies were part of Romania’s modernization strategy, with the goal of creating a work force and building socialism. The county’s declining birth rate was partly attributed to a law that legalized abortion, so outlawing abortion (with some exceptions) was the first step. As time went on, measures because more extreme; contraceptives were not available in the country, and restrictions on abortions became tighter. Eventually, women underwent regular exams by state doctors, and if a woman was found to be pregnant, her pregnancy would be tracked to minimize her ability to obtain an illegal abortion (the primary means of available birth control). This resulted in women’s morbidity and mortality from unsafe abortions and unwanted children, who would be institutionalized in neglectful orphanages. This is a crystal-clear example of a pronatalist government agenda. But, of course, government policies and cultural attitudes do not have to go this far to qualify as a pronatalist state.

Pronatalism as an Attitude

Historian Laura Lovett (2007) argues that while Europe has mostly relied on legislation to manage population growth, America has relied more on ideological and cultural ideas of pronatalism. She studied key figures from 1890 through the 1930s and found that nostalgic idealizations of motherhood, the family, and the home were used to construct a political agenda and social policies regarding reproduction. She calls this construction “nostalgic modernism,”
which romanticized agrarianism and promoted scientific racism and eugenics, in particular the campaigns that celebrated reproduction that would mirror the rural white family. Through this history, Lovett shows how the more recent idea of “family values” has taken root in politics and used as a pronatalist force.

Pronatalist attitudes can also be seen as stigma against those without children. It has long been argued that the nuclear family is the ideal in the United States and that there are negative stereotypes about those who do not conform to this model (Ganong, Coleman, and Mapes 1990; Wegar 2006). Moreover, a variety of studies have shown that negative characteristics are attributed to the voluntarily childless, such as: less well-adjusted than parents, less nurturant than parents, unhappily married, psychologically maladjusted, emotionally immature, materialistic, career driven, selfish, lonely, unhappy, misguided in their choice to remain childless, less caring, and with less interpersonal warmth (Polit 1978; Blake 1979; Peterson 1983; Vevevers 1980; Lampman and Dowling-Guyer 1995; Lamastro 2001; Miall 1986). Voluntarily childless individuals also perceive themselves as negatively stereotyped by friends and relatives at higher rates than those who are parents (Somers 1993). These attitudes have changed slightly in more recent years, but are still mixed. For example, about half of respondents in a 2009 survey said that it makes no difference if women have children or not. However, 38% of respondents said a woman never having children is bad for society, up from 29% in a similar 2007 survey (Livingston and Cohn 2010b). The voluntarily childless have also reported experiencing discrimination in social situations, in the work place, and through policy. Some voluntarily childless report discrimination in the workplace, as they do not have equal access to the value of work benefits, such as daycare, and find themselves being asked to work more hours than parents because it is assumed that they have fewer family responsibilities (Burkett 2002). Even when the
voluntarily childless explain their reasoning, their explanations are often disregarded by those who infer that they will change their mind about the issue (Gillespie 2000).

Pronatalism as Policy

A classic example of pronatalist policy in the United States seems benign. Personal exemption in tax policy (that is, being able to “claim” dependent(s) on one’s taxes) is a way to promote reproduction (Faux 1984). In fact, many countries use economic policy to attempt to influence fertility rates. For example, France has an extensive array of family allowances designed to increase birth rates (Heeren 1982), while China famously employed extreme antinatalist economic incentives (Davis, Bernstam, and Ricardo-Campbell 1987). Economists Whittington, Alm and Peters (1990) use data from 1913 to 1984 in the United States to demonstrate that the personal exemption has a demonstrable effect; it raises the national birthrate. Though it is not necessarily a common opinion, some childfree advocates see the tax code as “maternal affirmative action” (Burkett 2000).

Reproductive health legislation in the United States is often created at the state level. Since 2010, reproductive health care has been a hot-button topic in the United States, and legislation reflects that. Much of the controversy has centered on abortion, but policies that limit abortion most often serve to limit access to birth control in general. For example, Texas enacted a state program in 2013 that barred clinics providing abortion services from receiving public funds; this resulted in the closure of many clinics. As a result, it became more difficult to obtain birth control (Stevenson et al. 2016). In 2016, eighteen states enacted fifty new abortion restrictions (Nash et al. 2016a). In fact, 30% of the abortion restrictions enacted by states since Roe v Wade (1973) happened between 2010 and 2016. Texas has been in the thick of this political battle with policies enacted to limit access to contraceptive services at Planned
Parenthood and policies that shut down more than half of the abortion clinics in the state. Gold and Hasstedt (2016, 970) warn that “Texas serves as a harbinger of what happens when family planning funding is slashed and the provider network is dismantled.” A recent study made headlines when it found that the maternal mortality rate in Texas doubled from 2010 to 2014 (MacDorman et al. 2016). This huge jump is difficult to explain outside of a natural disaster or major war and warrants further research. There has been pushback, though; the key policies that led to the shutdown of abortion clinics in Texas were challenged and made it to the supreme court in the case *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt* in June 2016, where the legislation was struck down; it was found as not based in scientific fact and therefore without merit. Similarly, as a response to state legislatures limiting access to contraception (including abortion), there was also a significant uptick in contraceptive access in many state legislations (Nash et al. 2016b).

Since the election of Donald Trump as president, there have been more federal rollbacks on contraception access. In 2017, Trump signed legislation that allows states to deny funding for clinics that perform abortions (Davis 2017) and legislation that makes it easier for employers to refuse contraceptive coverage in employee healthcare coverage (Pear, Ruiz, and Goodstein 2017). The current Republican platform affirms much of the state-level legislation limiting access to abortion in particular (Nash et al. 2016). The vice president, Mike Pence, is an anti-abortion advocate, speaking at events such as March for Life and openly discussing the “culture of life” (Pence 2017). The anti-abortion policies that limit access to contraception are often couched in discussions of religious freedom, personal responsibility, and valuing a fetus’ life. However, employing Ginsburg and Rapp’s (1991; 1995) approach, I argue that, at least in part, these legislative trends can be understood as pronatalist measures that encourage women’s reproduction. The legislation creates barriers that women must overcome to access family
planning resources. Of course, pronatalist attitudes and policy are not applied evenly for all groups.

Latina Reproduction

The topic of Latina reproduction—and, imprecisely, “Mexican” reproduction—is a present and controversial one in the public imagination in the United States and has been for quite some time. Latina reproduction is politicized and scrutinized. It is a potent symbol of American prejudice against “Mexicans” (often used as a blanket term for all Latinos/as), who are typically portrayed as undocumented immigrants. This section introduces a history of eugenics and coerced sterilization in the United States and discusses contemporary discourse around Latino/a reproduction in the United States. It also grounds these discussions in demographic information. Participants in my study are making reproductive decisions in these historical and cultural contexts that inform stratified reproduction in the United States.

Latinos/as and Sterilization in the United States

A full discussion of attitudes about Latino/a reproduction in the United States, unfortunately, includes the eugenic policies of the past and how they resonate to the current day. People of Latin American origin in the United States (especially from Mexico and Puerto Rico) were frequent targets of eugenicists, who believed them to be "polluting" the white American race. Here I will focus on a particularly well-documented and researched example of these histories: that of Mexican-origin people in California. In this example, we can see how one’s position as a woman or man, one’s racialized identity as a Mexican, and the mobilization of Mexican bodies as nonnormative created a climate where reproductive opportunities were

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25 Another compelling case is that could be explored in this context is that of Puerto Ricans, both in Puerto Rico and in New York. [See Lopez (2008, 1993)]. However, here I focus on Mexican-origin women in the Southwest because that most closely resembles my sample.
severely constrained. In 1916, Mexican bodies became medicalized at the United States-Mexico border. They were subject to rigorous inspection and disinfection procedures at the border (Stern 2005a). Mexicans were seen as able-bodied, more able to do physical work than whites; this characteristic served to mark them as racially distinct in the public imagination (Molina 2006b). The first half of the twentieth century presented “The Mexican Problem” for whites in the United States: Mexican migrants (in particular, their indigenous heritage) would weaken white American stock, but they were needed for labor (Stern 2005b). Public health outbreaks that affected white populations were also pinned on Mexican migrant workers (Molina 2006b), which resulted in waves of intense scrutiny and treatment of Mexican bodies at the border26 (Stern 2005a). Mexicans were stigmatized as disease carriers. Mexican bodies were Othered, seen as less-than, and used as an arena to deny full citizenship—or for that matter, personhood—to them. Starting in the 1920s, disability was used as an excuse to medicalize them and to lock down borders. Psychometricians argued that Mexicans had low IQ scores across the board, and criminologists attempted to show that Mexicans had “innate tendencies toward vagrancy and malefaction” (2005a, 99).

Popular opinion at the time was that Mexicans had high birth rates and would, therefore, would be inclined toward miscegenation (Hubbard 2011). This perception made health professionals feel they had the right to sterilize Mexican women (Gutiérrez 2009). A solution to this “problem” for eugenicists was to limit reproduction of Mexican-origin people through forced or coerced sterilization. For example, in the 1920 California census, Mexican Americans made up about 4% of the state population, but Mexican men and Mexican women, respectively, comprised 7% and 8% of those sterilized (Stern 2005b). It is speculated that this rate would have

26 Up to and including being doused with DDT.
been higher, but institutions often forced repatriation for Mexican Americans. This history is particularly notable in California, as it performed almost twice as many sterilizations as the next most prolific state, considered forced sterilization a public health strategy through the 1950s, and continued legally through the 1970s (Stern 2005b).

A variety of diagnoses were used to justify sterilization (psychosis, manic depression, feeble mindedness, and more), but some given reasons were gendered. Stern (2005b, 1131) found that, “[a] notable percentage of these young patients were typed as masturbators or incest perpetrators if male and as promiscuous—even nymphomaniacal—or having borne a child out of wedlock if female.” Assumptions about gender norms and female sexuality drove much of California’s sterilization program. When techniques for surgical removal of the fallopian tubes (salpingectomy) were improved in the 1920s, a trend emerged: for women and young girls, being perceived as immoral, loose, or unfit for motherhood increasingly became a reason for sterilization (Stern 2005b).

Coerced sterilization focused on working-class minorities, including Latinos/as, continues to the current day, especially in California. A complete history is outside of the scope of this chapter, but I will provide some examples. In 1975, a group of working-class Mexican-origin women filed a class action suit against the California hospital where they had been coerced into tubal ligations.27 The women in the case, Madrigal v. Quilligan, had all undergone cesarean deliveries. One of the women, Helena Orozco, stated:

[A] doctor said that if I did not consent to the tubal ligation that the doctor repairing my hernia would use an inferior type of stitching material which would break the next time I became pregnant, but that if I consented to the tubal ligation that the stitches would hold as proper string would be used. No one ever explained what a tubal ligation operation was, I thought it was reversible. (as cited in Enoch 2005, 10)

27 These tubal ligations were funded by federal agencies that funded family planning initiatives (Stern 2005b).
The plaintiffs lost their case, but its importance still resonates. In 2013, for example, the Center for Investigative Reporting uncovered that from 2006-2010, at least 148 female inmates in a California prison were coerced into sterilization procedures (Johnson 2013).

_Eugenics in Texas_

Eugenic history has not been as extensively studied in Texas as in California; Texas did not have enforced sterilization laws, as many other states did. There is some literature on eugenic histories of the Deep South (e.g. Larson 1996), but Texas is, culturally and geographically, somewhere between the South and the Southwest. There is not documentation of forced sterilization in Texas history, but, like the rest of the country, there is a eugenic legacy. The first proposed bill mandating sterilization of the mentally ill and other undesirable genes as a eugenic measure was in Texas in 1849. The legislation was never sponsored, but it was the first serious attempt of its kind in the United States (Head 2017). As early as 1893, the editor of the _Texas Medical Journal_ recommended sterilization by castration for “sexual perverts” (Daniel 1912). And, as in much of the country, the Eugenics Society of the United States of America held “Fitter Families Examination” contests in the state; below is paperwork from one held (Hopkins 2009) at the 1925 State Fair in Dallas.
Figure 2: Fitter Families Form

There were also “Better Baby Contests” across Texas, including in Fort Worth, Longview, Mineral Wells, and Marshall in the early 1900s (Hopkins 2009). The eugenic emphasis in Texas was focused on preventing the mentally ill from weakening the gene pool by reproducing; there isn’t evidence that it focused on race in the ways it did in California or the Deep South.
Birth rates of Latinos/as in the United States have slowed, which mirrors the slowing fertility rates in the United States more generally (Martin et al. 2018). Their changing ideas about family formations also mirror transformations in the general United States population, as part of a long-term trend toward smaller families in the United States. Moreover, Americans now report a preference for a small family size. While Latinas are more likely to have larger family sizes than women in the United States as a whole, there has been a downward trend in large family sizes since 1988. Latinos/as in the United States are also a bit more likely to live in a family household than whites; 78% of Latino/a households are family households, while that is true of 64% of white households (U.S. Census Bureau 2012a). Moreover, there are a wide variety of family forms in the United States. Both the nuclear family and two-parent households are becoming less common, people are waiting longer to get married, and the marriage rate is declining. Furthermore, a variety of family forms have become more visible in recent years, such as: homosexual parents, single-parent families, step-families, adoptive families, and multi-
generational households.\textsuperscript{36} While there are differences between Latino/a and white reproductive rates and households, they are not wildly different. Yet we construct them as very different. Moreover, the further removed Latinas are from the immigrant generation and the more income and education they obtain, Latina fertility rates begin to converge with those of whites (Chavez 2004; Parrado and Morgan 2008). It should also be noted that fertility rates in Mexico have been declining for decades (Hirsch 2003) and that Carole Browner (2000) found that women in rural Mexico typically wanted fewer children than a pronatalist government promoted.

In recent United States history, there has been a rise in childlessness. In the 1970s, the rate of childlessness for women at the end of their reproductive years was only 10%, while recent estimates range from 15% to 20% (Livingston and Cohn 2010; Livingston 2015). Recent estimates of the rate of childlessness for Latinas range from 10% to 17%. Moreover, there has been a decline in involuntary childlessness due to: decreased sterility from sexually transmitted diseases, improved treatment for infertility, and overall better health (Heaton, Jacobson, and Holland 1999). These facts taken together suggest that voluntarily childlessness is on the rise (Park 2002). Despite the apparent increase in voluntary childlessness inferred from population statistics and the fact that it is practiced across ethnic and racial groups in the United States, to my knowledge, no one has studied the phenomenon among Latinos/as.

However, Latina reproduction is most often characterized in public discourse as threatening to United States society. Leo Chavez (2004) analyzed ten national magazines over a thirty-five-year period and found that public discourse in the United States paints Latinas as having high fertility rates, using “too much healthcare,” and as planning a “reconquest” of the

\textsuperscript{36} More than four out of ten American adults have at least one step relative in their families (Pew Research Center 2011). And 2008 data show that 16.1% of Americans live in a multi-generational household – the highest rate since 1944 (Pew Research Center 2010a).
United States. These assumptions—reinforced through national popular discourse—fuel the argument that Latina reproduction is a threat to white United States society. Further, Chavez (2004) argues that anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States have focused on Mexican immigrant and United States-born Mexican American women’s supposedly excessive reproduction (Chavez et al. 1997; Chock 1996; Gutiérrez 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Wilson 2000; Zavella 1997). Gutiérrez (2009) argues that the construct of Latina “excessive” reproduction as a United States social problem is most clearly marked by the “Save Our State” initiative in California: Proposition 187 in 1994. It denied social services, including prenatal care, to undocumented immigrants, especially women and children. Pregnant immigrant women were explicitly identified as the problem by many of the proposition’s backers, arguing that they were in California only to claim benefits.

Unfortunately, this argument still rings true. For example, the derogatory term “anchor baby”—though an old term—reemerged in 2006, referring to Mexican woman giving birth in the United States to a baby who would later be able to sponsor its parents’ citizenship. It connotes a sense that these children are not true American citizens (Chavez 2017; Chavez 2013). The term came into use in the midst of a debate on immigration; a Republican-controlled Congress passed legislature to build 700 feet of fence on the United States-Mexico border, while immigration rights activists were vocal about their opposition (Phillips 2015). Around 2010, there was a push to do away with birthright citizenship, culminating in a proposed bill in 2011 and similar fights at the state level (Chavez 2013). By the time Republican presidential candidates were using the term, it had come to connote a conservative anti-immigrant stance. Both President Trump and Texas Senator Dan Patrick (later to become Lieutenant Governor of Texas) have infamously
used the term. The perception of Mexican American women as hyperfertile is one that is especially enduring (Gutiérrez 2008).

In my experience, there is often an assumption that these stereotypes don’t follow Latinas into professional contexts, that their socioeconomic class protects them from stereotypes about Latina “hyperfertility.” The literature on Latinas in white-collar jobs does not suggest that this is the case. Vallejo (2009; 2012) recounts efforts of the Latina business group she was working with to network with the area business community. The women working their booth regularly encountered assumptions that they were victims of “machismo” or that they would prefer to have large families over achieving professional success. These gendered stereotypes, often rooted in the idea that Latinas are hyperfertile, show up in a variety of studies (e.g. Zavella 1997).

The “high” rate of Latina fertility is taken for granted in the United States. Anecdotally, this was confirmed every time I discussed my project with a friend, family member, community member, etc. Gutiérrez (2008) argues that social science has produced and reproduced the category of the fertile Mexican through its research on fertility and demographics. Chavez (2004; 2013) similarly argues that the phrase “Latina reproduction” has a limited number of meanings, typically centering on high rates of reproduction. Social science established Mexican fertility as “high” and then continued to study Mexican fertility—typically utilizing assimilationist assumptions—until it created a category of analysis around it (Gutiérrez 2009). Gutiérrez only analyzed work through the 1980s; since then, there have been a variety of scholarly works pushing back on this idea. For example, Marchi and Guendelman (1994) found that Latina girls had lower rates of sexual activity than non-Latina girls, which they attributed to Latino/a cultural norms. In fact, their study suggests that with an “increasing acculturation to United States norms and values, Latina girls engage in sexual activities at an earlier age and are more likely to have
births out of wedlock” (210). Moreover, Latinas as a group are not generally opposed to oral contraceptives or other contraceptive methods (Amaro 1988; Stroup-Benham and Treviño 1991). Despite contributions such as these, the assumption of high Latina reproduction remains in social science literature.

The other part of panic about Latino/a fertility is that reproduction among whites has declined (Chavez 2013). It is not only that Latinas have “too many” children, but also that whites aren’t having “enough,” yielding a fear of a dwindling proportion of white Americans. We see the concept of “the browning of America” appear as early as the 1980s, reflecting this demographic fear (Chavez 2013). The United States is not the only place where this is happening. For example, Krause (2005) documents this process in Italy at a time where Italian birth rates were at an all-time low. There was much demographic hand-wringing about how immigrants were having more children than native-born Italians. This demographic panic functioned as racial politics.

Conclusion

Issues of immigration and reproduction are linked in American discourse about Latinos/as. This discourse centers the idea of the United States as largely white and promotes the fiction that Anglos deserve to be in the United States because they were rightfully born there. This, of course, denies the processes of colonization and subsequent waves of immigrants to the United States that are now culturally coded as white (e.g. Irish). It also assumes that Latino/a reproduction is driven by ulterior motives or ignorance. Latinos/as (glossed most often as undocumented Mexicans) have children to take over the United States, as a way to sneakily obtain citizenship; or, they do not practice family planning. The description I just laid out is a “strong form” of this discourse. Some Americans would agree with this. More Americans would
likely not agree with this paragraph, as written, but would reify and employ bits and pieces of it in their understanding of current events. For example, this could mean an inkling that an “anchor baby” narrative feels true, but an inability to say why. And, as demonstrated in this chapter, this discourse is reinforced through structures such as laws and policies.

This American context is true for my field site, Dallas/Fort Worth. However, local contexts also come into play. Dallas has a history that set up a particular structure of racial politics, where it is often difficult for Black and Latino/a groups to form coalitions because of a history wherein they were successfully pitted against each other. Moreover, D/FW is a multiethnic urban metropolis that has been experiencing increasing rates of immigration since 1990s, to both the city center and the suburbs. Since Latinos/as are such a large group in D/FW, they are concentrated in a variety of locations across the Metroplex. There is a rich literature on Latinos/as in the United States and a significant body of research on Mexican Americans in D/FW. However, there is very little written on middle-class Latinos/as in general, and what literature exists focuses on the workplace. Moreover, politics of family planning are intensified in the Texas context, with constantly shifting political restrictions, appeals, and repeals coloring the landscape, affecting Texans differently along lines of race and class. In the United States and in Dallas/Fort Worth, there are contexts of inequality surrounding issues of ethnicity, immigration, and reproduction with deep historical roots.
CHAPTER 4:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I conducted ethnographic field work in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas from June 2014 through June 2015. My field work centered on participation in various Latina networking groups and community events in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. I started visiting with these groups and attending their meetings in November 2011. This meant that I was getting to know local Latina networking groups and their participants for several years before I began to conduct interviews. My project’s primary methods were participant observation (both in groups and in participants’ homes), semi-structured interviews, and life history interviews (including marital histories).

In this chapter, I lay out my strategies for data collection and analysis for this project. After introducing my research questions, I describe my strategy for locating and selecting participants. Then, I describe my research methods and how they address my research questions. Lastly, I describe how I analyzed the data. It is important that I describe my research strategies, as the populations I worked with were based on a hidden characteristic—decision not to have children or to parent—populations that are, by definition, difficult to identify and find. Lastly, I reflect on my positionality in fieldwork and analysis and the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies and methods I have chosen in my work.

Research Questions

This project is guided by two central research questions:

1) How are Latino/a couples defining parenting relationships? Voluntary childlessness? Do
definitions vary based on: attitudes about gender roles, investment in career, relationship with parents, relationships with extended family, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, and amount of time in the United States?

2) Why do Latino/a couples choose not to have children or to become parents? What are their attitudes and values? Is this different for men and women? Is reproduction tied to ideas about attaining full personhood, and is this gendered? What gendered power dynamics are in play as couples negotiate the decision not to have children?

The Comparative Method

This project asks how reproductive narratives and kin links are constructed by two different groups within the population of heterosexual Latinos/as: parents and voluntarily childless. In doing so, it examines how the groups approach issues such as gender and power and how that may affect reproductive negotiations. However, at times, the project also considers how all participants in the project approach issues of family formation, looking for larger patterns that may speak to issues of cultural context or power inequalities. In this way, the project highlights similarities in approaches to family and culture among the two groups. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the split between the groups is imperfect and messy; however, there are still differences in the two groups that the comparative method highlights.

This project is also comparative in that it is attentive to gendered narratives and gendered power differences in couples. Thus, the project also functions to compare two groups: men and women (Fox and Gingrich 2002). This comparison is as important to the project as the one between parents and voluntarily childless couples. This is because women in both groups (and men in both groups) are under similar pressures. Moreover, changes in gender roles and ideals are relational; they do not change in isolation, but rather in relation to that of the opposite
sex. So comparisons between men’s and women’s experiences functions to illuminate differences between the two, but cannot be examined in isolation from each other.

Sampling

The voluntarily childless are a difficult population to access, as they typically do not gather together, and the characteristic of interest is hidden.\textsuperscript{37} The only way to identify and access this population is to get to know people through networking. I gathered my sample through professional networking groups, since previous research has identified the voluntarily childless as professionally oriented (Jacobson and Heaton 1991; Somers 1993; Veevers 1983). I located my sample of women from the same pool, so the two groups (parents and voluntarily childless) would be comparable. Further, I focused on groups that specifically cater to Latinas. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, I was sure to find people with one of my inclusion criteria there: Latinas. Second, participants in these groups were consciously interested in either maintaining Latino/a culture(s) or providing resources to Latino/a-identifying people (giving back). Therefore, members of these groups were not only people who trace their heritage to Latin America, but they were also invested in this heritage and identity. How this investment plays out is different for each person, but some examples are taking pride in a Latina identity and supporting other Latinos/as. In particular, one group focused on youth development to encourage young Latinas to pursue higher education. However, all of them assumed the importance of networking with other Latinas in order to develop connections (personal or business) to support one another.

\textbf{Community-based versus Clinical Sample}

In many ways, my project is asking similar questions to Carole Browner’s (e.g. Browner

\textsuperscript{37} I attended a “meetup” group for childfree individuals, the only one I could locate in the area. However, the group was almost exclusively Anglo and had no Latino/a participants.
2000; Markens, Browner, and Preloran 2003) and Rayna Rapp’s (2004) work on reproductive technologies. Carole Browner’s work, in particular, asks how Latino/a couples make decisions about pregnancy together in the clinic. Should the pregnant woman undergo genetic testing? If so, should the couple take action on the results, which may include termination of the pregnancy? Browner wants to know both how the clinicians are relaying information to couples, but also how the couples may (or may not) work together to make decisions and how historical and cultural pressures shape their decisions.

There are many advantages to using clinical samples when conducting research in medical anthropology. However, I felt my research question would be best understood in a community setting. First, reproductive negotiation in the family/home setting is not typically a medicalized experience. Though I asked participants about interactions with the clinic (obtaining birth control, doctors supporting their desire to postpone reproduction in the long-term, etc.), it did not emerge as an important theme. This project is, in large part, inspired by research with women who faced resistance in the clinic when they asked to be sterilized (in particular, Campbell 2003; Campbell 1999). However, those who choose to be sterilized are only a small part of those who are voluntarily childless. And, moreover, the history of forced sterilization against people of color in the United States creates a very different context for Latinos/as seeking permanent birth control than for Anglos (Stern 2005a; Molina 2006a); only one female participant made this choice.

In short, the negotiations that are key to my participants’ reproductive negotiations are happening in their homes, communities, and places of business. They are embedded in marital relationships and kin networks, while reflecting and reshaping cultural contexts. For these reasons, a community-based sample was the most useful for my research question. My challenge
was to find a place where I could locate middle-class Latino/a couples that would not introduce bias into my sample. This meant that common community-based sample locations, such as churches, would not work for this project. My solution was to use Latina professional networking groups.

**Networking Groups**

I recruited all couples from Latina professional networking groups in Dallas/Fort Worth. As I was brainstorming locations I could use to locate participants with a friend, she mentioned a Latina networking group that she used to attend in Austin. I cold-contacted the regional organizer for Latina Women’s Organization (LWO), 38 explaining my research interests and asking permission to attend local meetings, and was kindly welcomed. The first meeting I went to was one the regional director was attending. From there, I got to know local organizers and members. As I became familiar with LWO, I started to learn of other events and groups in the D/FW area and cold-emailed the Dallas and Fort Worth chapters of Professional Hispanic Women of Texas and was granted permission to attend their meetings as well. I also attended other groups’ events as I was invited, but they did not prove fruitful for recruiting participants. The recruitment for this project was challenging, but the enthusiastic welcome I got at several Latina women’s groups made it possible.

I recruited women in these networking groups, and they introduced me to their husbands. I primarily found participants by attending monthly group meetings. However, each group also has a well-developed listserv. I distributed a written call for participants through these listservs and spoke with those who replied as being interested in participating. I asked anyone who I spoke with questions to ensure that they matched my inclusion/exclusion criteria. Then, I set

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38 Networking groups are identified with pseudonyms.
appointments to meet with them for first interviews. Ideally, I interviewed husbands and wives separately, though a few couples strongly preferred to be interviewed together for the first of two interviews, so I complied with their request. Every participant completed a written informed consent form, which had been approved by SMU’s Institutional Review Board. Each participant chose her/his preferred language (English or Spanish), and the consent form and interview for the appropriate language were used. Interviews were typically in the couple’s homes, though some were conducted in their work offices or in coffee shops. The first interview was a semi-structured interview covering a variety of topics. After the first interview, we scheduled a second interview, which was a wide-ranging interview, including marital histories.

I worked most intensely with two networking groups: Latina Women’s Organization and Professional Hispanic Women of Texas (both Dallas and Fort Worth chapters). However, I also attended events at the Latino Cultural Center, events hosted by Mujeres Poderosas, and LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) chapters’ community meetings as I was able. As is common in circles with overlapping interests, I also met representatives of local Latino/a-focused non-profit organizations at these events. Both parents and women without children attended these events, so I was able to locate all of my participants from these groups or from referrals from these groups.

Latina Women’s Organization is a national group wherein local chapters hold monthly potluck meetings at a participant’s home. The group supports Latinas by providing them with a place to make personal and professional connections. Meetings typically had between 10-30 participants, but they also had a large email listserv. I attended monthly meetings and also sent out invitations to participate in my project on the listserv. Monthly meetings were very casual; the group gets together and introduces themselves to one another, but the networking is very
friendly. Almost exclusively women attend these meetings.

Professional Hispanic Women of Texas is a state-wide organization whose goals are to promote women’s participation in the public sphere and to promote “positive Hispanic values.” A focal point for this group is the scholarship fund and education series they maintain to promote Latinas’ access to higher education. The groups meet in a restaurant once a month around a central theme or presentation; this could be meeting with local politicians before an election or learning about the historical *barrios* of Dallas. There is still a casual feel, but the program is less focused on mingling and more on the event for the day. All officers in this group are women, but meetings are attended by many men as well. This group also maintains large email listservs. I recruited from this group both by in-person meetings as well as through the listserv.

My role in these groups was always as a visitor. If there was a fee for an event I attended, I paid it. I did not join groups as a member or sign on to participate in any sub-groups or committees. Before visiting these groups, I would be in contact with organizers to have them approve my attendance. The organizers served as gatekeepers who gave me access to in-person meetings as well as to their listservs so I could be notified of events and access to meetings. They also sent out my digital calls for participants under their names to the listserv, giving me more legitimacy than an email from a stranger. They were key informants for each group or chapter, helping to guide me during networking meetings and catching me up on the culture of the groups. They were all kind and enthusiastic, and I am forever grateful to them.

The format of these meetings centers on meeting new people and networking. Therefore, it was very easy to make it clear that I was a researcher and interested in finding people to participate in my project. It also made it easy to meet many new people in a meeting, as everyone expected to be approached by a stranger. For regular attendees, I was able to build rapport with
them at each new meeting. For others, we often communicated further by phone and/or email after the event and got to know each other that way before meeting for our first interview.

**Inclusion Criteria**

The category of “Latino/a” and the characteristic of “voluntarily childless” are both highly variable, so I employed various inclusion criteria as I enrolled participants in the project. In an effort to minimize variability, I only sampled middle-class couples (see full description below). To be included in the project, participants needed to identify as Latino/Hispanic/having Latin heritage. Participants also had to be in a long-term heterosexual coupling, in order to ensure they could speak to negotiations within a couple; all participants were engaged or married. Participants had to be over eighteen years old and live in an urban or suburban area of Dallas/Fort Worth. Participants had to either have children or report that they did not want to have children at time of recruitment.

**Middle Class**

The concept of class, and particularly the middle class, is a tricky one to nail down, both sociologically speaking and culturally speaking, in the United States. It is not common for Americans to have a strong class identity, but people in wildly varying income brackets will often identify themselves as “middle class.” A Gallup Poll shows that most Americans identify themselves as middle class or upper middle class, and that fact remains independent of economic trends (Dugan 2012). Because self-identification was not a helpful metric for this inclusion criterion, I instead asked what potential participants’ occupations and education level were, as those are important class markers (Gilbert 2014). In line with common criteria for middle-class membership, almost all participants in the study had taken at least some college courses, and at

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40 Two women had Anglo husbands
least one member of each couple had taken college courses, most commonly holding a college
degree. Participants almost exclusively were salaried workers or worked for themselves, showing
a level of economic attainment.

Household income is a problematic indicator of class, as the same income can look very
different, depending on how many people were in the household. Moreover, when searching for
a numerical measure of middle class, some experts argue that wealth (savings, assets, etc.) is the
best measure, while others argue that consumption (spending) is the best option (Gilbert 2014).
Further complicating the issue, many participants (both with and without children) were helping
to support extended family members or close friends. That said, household income was over
$75,000 for all households except one, who chose the $50,000-$74,999 as the best fit.41

Lastly, all participants lived in middle-class or upper-middle-class neighborhoods, based
on my knowledge of the area. I visited most participants in their homes for interviews. Many
lived in suburban neighborhoods, and some lived in more expensive urban areas. Almost none of
the participants lived in the traditionally Mexican American neighborhoods of Dallas/Fort
Worth. Taken together, I can confidently state that all participants in the study can be grouped as
middle or upper-middle class based on education and professional identifiers.

Quota Sampling

I used a quota sampling method to make sure various groups were represented in my
project (Bernard 2006). My goal was for half of the participants to be parents and half to be
voluntarily childless, with a split between men and women. When I reached network saturation, I
had narratives representing twenty-one couples (eleven parent couples, ten childless couples).
See Table 1 below for a visual representation of my quota. Each couple had a woman who

41 This participant was divorced and a PhD student, so though her current income was slightly lower than the group
as a whole, her one-person household and educational track make her easily fit in with the group.
participated in the project, but not all men wanted to participate. I knew this would be a possibility, as there is a methodological concern that men may not consider themselves “experts” on topics of family and reproduction, and thus may simply tell researchers to “ask their wives” when they are interviewed on the topic (if they agree to be interviewed at all) (Lareau 2000). For this reason, I went into the project optimistic that I would recruit men, but aware that I would likely not get 100% participation from male partners. In sum, there were twenty-one women and fourteen men in my sample; three voluntarily childless men and one father declined to participate.42

Table 1: Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voluntarily Childless</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8 (plus 2 Anglo)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Counts in individual participants

At this point in data collection, I had reached theoretical saturation. Similar themes began to come up regularly in interviews and, though individual details varied in narratives, new significant data were no longer coming up. For a summary of my participants and some of their key characteristics, see Appendix A.

The age range of my participants was 29-63. Age range for voluntarily childless and parent participants were similar, with the voluntarily childless range as 29-63 and parents as 35-62. I have participants covering a range of age-based life stages: in the early stages of marriage, still in their reproductive decision-making years, and those past their reproductive years.

42 Additionally, one other participant was divorced and speaking about her previous relationship.
However, some participants were quick to point out that even as they pass their reproductive years, they know that they would always be able to adopt a child. So for some, reproductive uncertainty may last beyond their mid-40s.

I included both parents and voluntarily childless couples in the project so that I could compare the two groups in terms of attitudes about gender and views on family formation. This division was necessary to ensure diversity in my sample, but as my project shows, this division is artificial in a number of ways. Views on one’s reproductive status and goals are necessarily messy and complicated by cultural expectations and lived realities.43

This quota sample built on networking means that my project cannot be truly representative of all middle-class Latinos/as in Dallas/Fort Worth or in Texas. Further, it is possible that sampling from groups so conscious of ethnic identity and professional networking, I have skewed the sample in some unknown way. As the sample size is small, which is common for a qualitative project, the results are not meant to be generalizable. There is no way to obtain a statistically significant random sample when sampling from a population with hidden characteristics, such as this one. What these data do provide, however, is a depth of knowledge about ways that some Latinos/as view family, reproductive negotiation, and gender roles. It delves into the complicated nature of how these issues are negotiated in couples.

The “Problem” of Men

Collecting men’s narratives of family formation is an important part of this project. I have only been able to find one qualitative study that focuses on voluntarily childless men (Lunneborg 1999), which the author considers a pilot study, rather than a full investigation. It is clear that there is a dearth of information on voluntarily childless men and that even researchers

43 See Chapter 5 for more on this idea.
have typically framed voluntary childlessness as a women’s issue.

I recruited men through their wives; my strategy of sampling couples through women’s groups was a successful one. The women turned out to be my greatest supporters when recruiting their husbands for interviews. If husbands were on the fence about participating, their wives would cajole them into participating. Once the interviews began, the men were generally engaged and forthcoming during their interviews. Further, not all men agreed to participate, citing either lack of time or privacy concerns. In the end, four men declined to participate (three childless, one parent).

Participant Observation

Participant observation was an important part of this project, though proved challenging in a group of urban and suburban professionals who put a premium on “busy.” Originally, I had hoped to find representative key participants whose families I would be able to get to know more closely. I intended to conduct more participant observation and short interviews with family members where possible. However, this idea unexpectedly brought up ethical issues. I had, perhaps naively, assumed that voluntarily childless couples would be at least somewhat known to their families. If having children is such an important part of people’s lives, surely their families and close social circles would have noticed that the couple had no children and would push for an explanation; therefore, the characteristic would be somewhat out in the open. However, I found that this was not the case for most voluntarily childless couples. Moreover, for the couples who were open about their choice, it was often a point of discomfort with their families. Given these findings, I felt it would be irresponsible to draw attention to these couples in their extended families with my presence as a researcher.

However, I did complete participant observation in this project in various forms. An
important place for participant observation for me was in the Latina networking meetings and community meetings (described above). Through these meetings, I was able to understand more about what topics were important to my population. I was also able to participate in informal conversations on a variety of topics. When I told people about my research topic, they almost always responded with their thoughts on it or with anecdotes about friends. In one group in particular, family was an important topic for the women, as it came up often.

I also completed participant observation in participants’ homes. Often before or after interviews, I was able to have meals with the family or spend time chatting in their homes. These windows helped me understand more about their family dynamics and the ebb and flow of their days. I held babies, met dogs, said hello to relatives who dropped by unannounced (as they had a habit of doing), and saw a particularly impressive rare tequila collection. I often conducted two interviews in a row—the wife and husband—so on those days, I would be in the couple’s home for an extended time period.

Though my project does in engage in participant observation in many ways, it is also not the kind of participant observation one might find in classic ethnographies. This is a common issue for ethnographers in the United States (Forsey 2010; Ortner 2003). My participants lived all over Dallas/Fort Worth, so there was no neighborhood to move to. Moreover, I likely could not afford to live in the areas where many of my participants live, even if I had found one such location to be representative in some way. The project does engage with a location, with Dallas/Fort Worth as a general backdrop that presents similar challenges, opportunities, and cultural touchpoints for all of my participants. But it is not aiming to provide an ethnography of a city, per se.

I find Martin Forsey’s (2010) discussion of contemporary ethnography instructive:
At a time when the study of ‘a culture’ and the production of a portrait of a people is less desirable, and perhaps less attainable, than it once was, there has been a shift in focus towards themes and processes as ‘objects of study’ that are not always amenable to observation. I can think of no useful way of observing school choice in practice; it takes place in an instant but is usually the result of some process of discernment. The best way to capture what people do is to meet with them, to interview them and invite them to tell me what they did, why they did it and how this impacted upon them. But I and my research associate (Marnie Giles) did not simply ask research participants about school choice. We conducted the interviews with an ethnographic imaginary, aimed at revealing the cultural context of individual lives as outlined above. (569)

Similarly, my project seeks to interrogate themes and choices in relation to cultural context and structural inequalities. So while I do not use interviews to the exclusion of participant observation, I do employ what Forsey refers to as the “ethnographic imaginary” in my interviews, using them as another method to understand cultural context in a complicated ethnographic setting.

Forsey (2010) calls being attentive to the aural elements of fieldwork, in interviews and otherwise, “engaged listening;” this is in contrast to the visual nature of observation. I used engaged listening in data collection, as I spent much of my time in the field carefully listening: to participants at networking meetings, to topics of discussion at networking meetings, to participants interacting with their children and pets, to participants interacting with each other, and to participants with their parents and in-laws. Snippets of conversations—for example, a voluntarily childless participant telling her friends that she does not want to have children, and her friends responding in a choir that of course she would; women have children in their 40s now—and patterns in conversation—such as reminders of how women have children much later than they used to, so there is time—both inform my analysis. In short, Forsey’s (2010) practice of engaged listening, especially in combination with approaches to “the field” less reliant on a simple static location for ethnography enrich my approach to participant observation. Moreover, his notion of the “ethnographic imaginary” illustrates how participant observation is not the only
All of my participant observation and engaged listening data were compiled in field notes. I was usually able to take some notes during participant observation. I took handwritten notes of interviews and often took field notes in the margins, not just on emerging themes or visuals from the interview, but also on other observations. During networking meetings, I was often able to jot down ideas on the backs of business cards without seeming out of place. After I returned home from events or interviews, I compiled existing field notes and wrote additional ones in Microsoft Word.

Interviews

Each participant completed two semi-structured interviews, and all interviews were conducted by the researcher. Most participants were interviewed separately from their partners for both interviews. However, some couples (three parent couples; three childless couples) strongly preferred to do the first interview together (Valentine 1999; Hertz 1995). In these instances, I was careful to get each participant’s individual answer to questions. While this approach is imperfect, as it allowed them to influence each other’s answers, it was an opportunity for us to build more rapport and to familiarize participants with the interview process. The first interview was composed of less personal questions than the second (marital history) interview, and I was able to use the second interview to confirm opinions expressed in the first interview. No one in these couples presented drastically different information in the second interview, so the consequences of these arrangements on the data were minimal.

Interview guides are listed in Appendix B.

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44 One couple declined to complete the second interview, but consented to their first interview being included in the project.
Each participant was asked the same series of open-ended questions, with parallel questions for parents and voluntarily childless participants. Follow-up questions were asked as needed to encourage participants to speak or to clarify answers. The first interview covered sociodemographic attributes and attitudes and values over a variety of topics. The second was a more detailed interview about the participant’s life, focusing on a dating and marriage history. The first interview usually lasted one to two hours, and the second around two hours. Interviews were ideally conducted at participants’ homes, but some preferred to meet for coffee or lunch, or in their office space. All interviews were recorded (except for one participant who was not comfortable being interviewed) and transcribed.

Participants were not offered money in exchange for participation. I typically brought coffee or a snack to share during our interviews as a thank you gift. Middle-class participants did not expect monetary rewards for participation, so this was not an issue. In fact, since I was a student, participants sometimes tried to buy me lunch or coffee (which I did my best to politely decline)! In short, the gesture of buying someone coffee or bringing a snack with me when I visited their homes was culturally appropriate for the population.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

With each participant, I completed a semi-structured interview (Browner 2000) covering: sociodemographic attributes, fertility decisions, participant’s attitudes about gender roles, attitudes about motherhood/fatherhood, investment in career, relationship with parents, relationships with extended family, religious affiliation, degree of religiosity, citizenship status, and amount of time in the United States. Issues of religion are included, as most Latinos/as in the United States subscribe to a pronatalist religion, with 68% of Latinos identifying as Roman Catholic and 15% as Evangelical Protestant (Pew Research Center 2007). Furthermore, there has
been debate about relationships between Protestantism, Catholicism, and gender roles in Latin America and Latino communities in the United States (Hunt 2001).

The semi-structured interviews were designed to identify patterns in characteristics - attitudes about gender roles, attitudes about motherhood/fatherhood, investment in career, relationship with parents, religious affiliation, and degree of religiosity. It also asked about participants’ attitudes and values regarding reproduction. All interviews were conducted by me, and almost all interviews were in English, as directed by that participant’s preferred language choice. One participant chose to complete his interviews in Spanish. For some, choosing English was a political choice; some native Spanish-speaking couples intentionally spoke English in the home. They felt perfecting their English was an important part of living in the United States. For others, English was their first language or the language they used most often in their daily lives.

**Marital History Interviews**

The second interview with all participants was a detailed interview covering the participant’s life and focusing on dating and marital history. This interview probed participants with general questions (such as “what was your childhood like?”) to encourage them to talk about their lives in their own words with their own emphases, asking follow-up questions as needed; at the end of the interview, I invited them to reflect on trends they have seen in their lives (such as: “Do you think expectations about becoming a parent were different for your mother/father than for yourself?”)

The second interview covered: individuals’ reproductive decisions, events in one’s personal history that influence reproductive decisions, and how reproductive decisions have shaped individuals’ lifestyle and relationships. This provided information about family relationships, kin structures, and important context for understanding fertility decisions, and how
they may have reframed past decisions. In addition, I asked how the concept of voluntarily childless, family structures, and reproductive expectations have changed over time. This method helped me to understand what individuals’ lives look like and what differences there may be in personal history between those who have children and those who do not. Furthermore, it helped me to understand if the rising rate of voluntary childlessness reflects changing gender ideology and development of personhood among Latinos/as. This interview included dating and marital histories in order to understand individuals’ histories of power dynamics and decision making surrounding coupling and reproduction. Marital histories included: the formation of the couple, how they decided to marry, and gendered power dynamics. These in-depth interviews provided the level of detail that is needed to paint clear pictures of individuals’ and couples’ experiences with family, relationships, and reproductive decisions.

Data Analysis

This project has a qualitative focus, with a goal of understanding what it means to make reproductive choices—in particular, those who choose not to have children—in a heterosexual couple from the point of view of the actors. It focuses not only on behavior of actors, but also on the context in which they happen (Geertz 1977). My data analysis, therefore, focuses on qualitative analysis: coding and analyzing interview data from participants. It draws from interview data, participant observation (field notes), and basic quantitative analysis to triangulate my data.

Unit of Analysis

This project uses the individual as the unit of analysis in some areas and the couple as the unit of analysis in others. Data were collected at the individual level, but are aggregated to the unit of the couple when necessary. When considering responses to gender role or identity in the
household, I used individuals’ responses to identify trends. In this case, each person had her or his own idea about gender. However, for much of the narrative analysis, there was an emphasis on the couple as the unit of analysis. Couples’ narratives were often analyzed in light of each other, yielding a fuller understanding of reproductive negotiation in a given relationship.

**Transcription**

All interviews (both semi-structured and marital history) were audio recorded, with the exception of one participant who was uncomfortable being recorded. For that participant, I took careful notes, including short direct quotes when possible, and later transcribed and coded that document. All interviews were transcribed. Twelve interviews were transcribed by one of three trained assistants, all of whom were advanced undergraduate students in anthropology and/or gender studies. I transcribed all remaining interviews. This resulted in 500 pages of (single-spaced) transcription. Interviews were transcribed to facilitate accurate coding. Transcriptions were invaluable in the careful investigation of narratives that is at the heart of qualitative work. They allowed me to understand not only what participants said, but also to thoroughly examine how they constructed their narratives.

**Coding**

Transcriptions from both interviews were coded using MAXQDA, a software program for analyzing qualitative data. Interviews were coded for themes inductively, then deductively, utilizing a grounded-theory approach (Bernard 2006). Before coding, I developed a code book based on themes that I expected to be important in my analysis. As I was coding, I used the “memo” function in MAXQDA to annotate documents to help identify new themes that emerged from the narratives. As new themes emerged, I would then enter them into my code book. I organized my codebook based on Guest and MacQueen’s (2008) format, including a description
of the theme, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and exemplars. I then went back and coded earlier narratives with the themes that had emerged. This was all performed at the level of the individual. I then performed content analysis, determining which themes were prevalent in the data and what information they yielded. After I had a good understanding of themes at the individual level, I began to read couples’ narratives together, recording where their narratives complement each other and diverged.

For the preliminary interviews with participants, qualitative analysis provided data on attitudes and values of the voluntarily childless and what differences there may be between parents and the voluntarily childless. Coding the wide-ranging personal histories marital histories illustrated why individuals choose not to have children and how couples negotiate fertility decisions. Reading the narratives together for themes illustrated ways in which couples viewed their reproductive negotiations.

**Key Word in Context Analysis (KWIC)**

Some themes were developed through a Key Word in Context Analysis (Stone, Dunphy, and Smith 1966) in MAXQDA. I completed a lexical search for the word or words that were of interest and then compiled them in context at the paragraph level. I then assigned this group a code in MAXQDA and in my code book so they could be easily retrieved later and to visualize how it overlapped with other codes. An example of where I used this technique was to find how people were using the idea of “ready.” I completed a lexical search for the word “ready” and then excluded any instances where it was not used in reference to reproductive negotiation.

Key Word in Context Analysis also helped me identify counts and themes in my data. I created Excel spreadsheets with abbreviated responses from each participants on key themes to illustrate if there were differences in how groups of people responded to questions (e.g. men and
women). A Key Word in Context Analysis helped me pull short phrases and sentences that represented themes in participants’ narratives to use in these tables. These tables helped me to identify trends in responses that I could then flesh out with tagged themes in my data.

**Quantitative Analysis**

Since my sample size is small, it does not lend itself to most kinds of quantitative analysis. I used an Excel table to keep track of demographic information about participants. As I developed themes and started to compare them, I also used tables in Excel to help me summarize information. For example, I used a column in my table to mark participants who use the language of “teamwork” and “partnership” to describe their relationship, which allowed me to see the pattern that voluntarily childless couples used this language more often than parents did. I also used tables to record who participants listed as part of their families and extended families, which allowed me to identify patterns. These tables allowed me to compare groups of people and identify trends. I also used them to generate lists of characteristics associated with different roles and reasons for different choices (e.g. reasons given to not have children).

**Positionality**

As someone who has spent most of her life in Texas cities (Houston and Dallas) and is a graduate student, I had an insider perspective with my participants in many ways. I understand the political and cultural milieu of urban Texas quite well and have a particular lived experience of it. Several participants indicated to me in their interviews that Texan was a component of their identities, and I feel the same way. I embrace some Texas mythologies, grew up attending the annual rodeo in Houston (the Dallas equivalent being the State Fair), and grew up eating Tex-Mex food. I grew up in what might be considered a lower-middle-class family in an American reckoning of the class system. Then and now I live(d) in cities where Mexican Americans and
other Latinos/as have had a great hand in shaping the culture of the city and live(d) adjacent to or in predominantly Latino/a neighborhoods. Based on my urban Texas background, I have some shared cultural assumptions based on geography and class with my participants. This was something that was important to be aware of in my analysis.

However, I am also an outsider in the space. The most obvious difference is that I am Anglo. As with many Anglo Americans, my heritage is unclear, and my family has no specific ethnic identity. I did not grow up in a similar ethnic or cultural context to my participants in this way. However, no one seemed surprised to see me in the networking groups where I recruited participants, as they have guests at meetings for any number of reasons. My analysis of ethnicity and culture comes from an outsider’s perspective in this way. Moreover, as I have very light skin, I have not encountered the kinds of racial prejudice that many of my participants might have. I have only had glimpses into this lived experience through shared experiences with friends who are people of color or by reading accounts.

My positionality as an insider/outsider in the field shaped my experience. It was not a large concern as I was recruiting participants. An advantage in using a networking group is that it is expected that strangers approach each other. I never felt that my appearance or lack of Latina identity put me out of place there. When it came time to interview people, they tended to assume that I was not of Hispanic descent. This was advantageous in some ways, as it meant they often stopped to explain details about specific traditions or Spanish idioms that they might not have if I were Latina. Whether I was familiar with them or not, these descriptions provided me with the participant’s point of view, which is often beneficial. However, for one bilingual couple, I got the sense that they chose to complete their interviews in English because I was not Latina. They were fully bilingual, so it did not compromise the interview or, importantly, informed consent.
But I do wonder if they would have been more comfortable using Spanish. Most participants chose English because it was the language they used at home.

My interviews did not typically cover difficult topics, and I got the sense that people were generally answering honestly. In people’s homes, I was treated as a guest, so people were sometimes a little nervous at first. But after we settled in to interviews, people did not seem reluctant to speak. A few times, when people seemed nervous, I asked them extra questions about a topic they seemed to like to talk about (often details of their job) to help build rapport. In data analysis, my interest in women’s narratives, and perhaps a connection with them because of my gender identity, drew me to them more than men’s narratives. I do feel it was appropriate to center women’s narratives in parts of this dissertation, as my strongest finding is that women have the final say in reproductive negotiations. However, I do look forward to future analysis of this data, focusing on masculinities and men’s narratives.

Limitations

This project, like all, has its limitations. Recruitment for the project was difficult, as the characteristic of interest (reproductive choices) is hidden. This limits the kinds of statements one can make with the data. As with most ethnographic research, I do not have a probability sample, so findings are not generalizable to a larger population. Nonprobability sampling is typically appropriate for qualitative (labor-intensive) studies and for studying sensitive topics in-depth (Bernard 2006). Most importantly, it is often the only option for hard-to-find populations, such as the voluntarily childless. However, the qualitative focus of the research allows me to dive into a complex social phenomenon.

Moreover, the project has a small sample size. There is much debate over what constitutes a complete sample in qualitative research, though many argue that a sample is
complete when it reaches theoretical saturation. Moreover, there is debate as to how a qualitative project reaches thematic saturation and even if that should be a measurement of quality for qualitative research (O’Reilly and Parker 2013). However, one analysis of theoretical saturation found that metathemes are present in as few as six carefully selected interviews, with more detailed themes emerging after twelve (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). So the idea that I was finding theoretical saturation with thirty-five participants is not unheard of.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented my approach to ethnography for this project. I laid out my methods, focusing on sampling, participant observation, interviews, and data analysis. This project required careful methods and persistent recruitment efforts to obtain a sample based on a hidden characteristic: desire to have children or to not have children. My approach to this question emphasizes qualitative methods and narrative analysis to look closely at a complicated issue in people’s lives. Further, I discussed the strengths and weaknesses of my approach. The small sample based on nonprobability sample has limitations, especially in that it is not generalizable, but lends itself to in-depth analysis. I rely primarily on the project’s qualitative strengths to analyze the ways in which participants negotiate periods of reproductive uncertainty and how these negotiations reflect and resist larger cultural ideals about gender and family.
CHAPTER 5

CHOICE, MODERN IDENTITIES, AND FAMILY FORMATION

Miguel, who migrated to the United States from Mexico as a young adult, is thirty-one-years-old and has several things he wants to accomplish before becoming a father. He says:

It’s not just, “oh I just want to live my life on my own with my wife.” It’s, “I want to make sure when we make that step, we’ll be as ready as we can be to take that step.” My mom had me when she was very young; she was twenty-one. And although we had money when I was growing up, when that disappeared, I noticed how difficult it can be to raise a family and to give your kids proper education when you can barely pay for electricity.

Miguel has specific ideas about what it means for him to be “ready” to be a father. Miguel feels that life will be easier if he waits to have children until he is financially ready for them. He bases this idea on his past experience; “ready” for him is likely different than “ready” for someone else. What does it mean to be “ready” to have children? What qualities are participants highlighting about themselves when they employ it? In this chapter, I will discuss how participants use the idea of “ready” in concert with that of “choice” and “fate” to make cultural sense of their reproductive narratives, especially in terms of gender and modernity.

As I listened to narratives of family-making and reproductive negotiations, similar themes emerged. To my surprise, these themes were often the same across parents and voluntarily childless couples. I found that, in practice, it was often difficult to distinguish the two groups. In this chapter, I argue that the categories of parent and voluntary childless exist on a spectrum, rather than as distinct categories. I then discuss how participants weave together the
ideas of fate and rational choice in their narratives to position themselves as middle-class citizens in culturally intelligible ways.

Resisting Categorization

When I began this research, the idea that parents and the voluntarily childless were two separate groups seemed clear. After all, a person either has a child or a does not. I assumed there might be difficulties in differentiating between voluntary and involuntary childlessness, but not between parents and non-parents. Depending on one’s age or life stage, “Do/did you parent a child?” is a question that seems simple, but quickly becomes complicated. When I was recruiting women to join the study, I briefly described each group and asked if they felt they fit into one or the other. Women immediately complicated my assumptions by raising a variety of questions, based on their personal experiences: What if I don’t have a relationship with my partner’s child? What if I have a close, nurturing role and financial responsibility to my niece? On the other hand, what if I tried to have children, but never pursued infertility treatment? What if I have had emotionally and/or physically difficult miscarriages? What if I had an unplanned child young, but now feel it is better not to have children?

I found that the idea of parent is not necessarily a biological one for many participants. Culturally-defined notions of blood relatedness are part of ideas about family, but there is also relational component. At least in part, parenting is about the relationships and roles that individuals and couples take on. This mirrors the approach that many “new kinship” scholars take to kinship and relatedness (Carsten 2011, 2000; Franklin and McKinnon 2002; Strathern 1992). Teresa describes this in her narratives. She is 55 years old; she grew up in San Antonio

45 For more information on these descriptions and categories, see Chapter 4
and is a third generation⁴⁶ American of Mexican descent. Teresa identifies herself as a mother, even though she has not given birth or raised a child in her household.

When we think of Teresa’s identity in terms of her life course, there was a period where she and her husband wanted children. After difficulty, they conceived, and she carried a pregnancy to term, but her baby was stillborn, due to a prolapsed cord. This was a difficult and tragic experience for both she and her husband. They were attached to their son and still think of him often. During her pregnancy, Teresa was a mother. Her baby was wanted, and in pregnancy, she was mothering him. However, when I asked Teresa if she considers herself a mother, her stillborn son was not part of her discussion. Though, he is included in her reproductive narrative. Motherhood, in this sense, is part of her history and was a focus in her roles and identity then, but her relationship to the role and identity has changed over time.

Now, Teresa considers herself a mother because of her nurturing and caring roles. Teresa feels that mothers give guidance and nurture children, roles she primarily took on with her stepchildren, but also with her nephews and nieces. Teresa’s stepchildren did not live with her and her husband, Juan. However, Teresa feels that she was an important link between Juan and his children. Juan feels that the role of the provider is the most important one for a father, and he fulfilled that role for his children. But Teresa says that she made sure that his children (who had different mothers) got to spend time together with them in the summers, so they would know each other. She also reports facilitating his emotional connection to them and ensuring that he spent quality time with them. She has stayed involved in their lives as they have become teenagers and young adults. In this way, Teresa’s mothering identity overlaps with a common theme from the literature on voluntarily childless women (e.g. Vissing 2002); they often

⁴⁶ Her mother was born in the United States, but during the Great Depression, her family moved back to Mexico for a time, so she was partly raised there.
emphasize their involvement in children’s lives, typically to reinforce their feminine identities. However, Teresa understands herself as a mother, not just a mother figure.

Teresa’s current mothering identity has a relational focus; it is based on the relationships she cultivates with her stepchildren and how she works with her husband to parent them. Teresa has cultivated these relationships, creating kin links with her stepchildren that are tangible to her. Of course, one’s social role and identity do not translate to legal parenthood or the associated rights and responsibilities. So while her husband likely has legal obligations, such as child support, for the children, her involvement is based on the value she places on kin links and her desire to foster them, rather than legal obligations.

Another possibility is that Teresa is framing herself as a mother as cultural work centered on identity management. That is, in looking at her life and history, she might find the mother label to be the most flattering choice. It is common for people to frame their lives in positive ways as part of the work of constructing a narrative. After all, she could have just as easily used the identity of stepmother. Or she could have rallied under the banner of infertility, as in other parts of her narrative, she was very outspoken about how infertility is a real and common part of women’s lives that should not be ignored. Instead, Teresa moves away from the association some Mexican American participants had with family and “blood,” reframing herself as a mother through her relationships and aligning herself with characteristics of a mother (nurturing). In this way, she is also able to present herself as having a valued status, that of a mother.

Teresa’s case may also be an expression of what anthropologist Bob Simpson (1994) describes as the “unclear family.” In opposition to the clear boundaries of a nuclear family, someone with a history of divorce, especially when there are children, has a less clear kin network. Simpson argues that divorce is a cultural expression of kinship and shows that
individuals’ descriptions of parenthood relationships with stepchildren are often an attempt to reconcile one’s narrative without an acceptable cultural script. In this framing, Teresa’s used her narrative to emphasize continuity when faced with a lack of frameworks to use for her story.

Teresa’s case illustrates that parenting roles and identities can be contested and flexible. Her identity as a mother has come from different sources over her life course, and she mobilizes her ideas about motherhood differently at different times in her life. So instead of understanding parents and voluntarily childless as distinct, impenetrable categories, I understand them as on a continuum. On one end are parents and at the other are voluntarily childless. This calls attention to the difficulty of distinguishing between the two and that there are many characteristics shared by both: for example, the emphasis women in both categories typically place on nurturing relationships with children. It also calls attention to the different relationships participants may have with non-biological children, such as stepchildren. This is not to say that some parents are “more” of a parent than others, but rather to suggest that the boundaries between the two groups are permeable.

Moreover, individuals may move between the categories of parent and voluntarily childless at different points in the life course. For example, Adriana has been both voluntarily childless and a mother at different points in her marriage. Adriana is a thirty-five-year-old mother who migrated to the United States from Mexico with her family when she was two years old. For the first decade or more of her marriage, she did not want to be a mother; career was what was important to her at that time. Then, she watched her friend spend three years trying to conceive. When her friend finally became a mother, Adriana saw how it changed her. Adriana explained that her friend’s experience inspired her to become a mother as well. At thirty-three-

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47 For more on how I operationalize the categories of parent and voluntarily childless, see Chapter 4.
years-old, she decided she wanted a child, and the child has become a meaningful part of her marriage. She crossed over from voluntarily childless to mother in her life course. If I had interviewed her five years ago, she would have told me that she does not have children and that she would not ever want to do so. She was happily settled into her marriage and work and wished to continue on that trajectory. This is a different experience than wanting to be a mother and postponing that decision until one is financially or emotionally prepared to do so.

Due to the difficulty in defining a negative, as in voluntarily childless, I also had a participant move the other way on the continuum. Martina (37) and Lucas (34) are both immigrants; Martina came to the United States from Mexico with her family when she was thirteen, and Lucas immigrated from Argentina with his family when he was ten, though he did return to Argentina for two years with his family during his teenage years. They are both Catholic and consider themselves religious, but only occasionally attend church. Neither had been married before, but Martina has a son, Sam, from an earlier relationship. However, she had him when she was young; Martina and Lucas have not had children together, and do not plan to. When I explained my category of “voluntarily childless” to Martina and Lucas, they said that is where they best fit. They felt it was especially salient for this point in their lives, since Sam (Martina’s son) is a teenager and self-sufficient in many ways now, even though Sam lives with them. Moreover, Lucas did not enter Sam’s life until he was twelve-years-old. Lucas does not consider himself to be Sam’s father, but rather something closer to a friend, because Sam already has a father who is involved with his life.

Martina and Lucas do not see parenting as an important part of their identities. Martina explained, “so if you are already giving so much up when you’re getting married, and then you give another so much [of yourself] when you have kids. Then what’s left of you? Of what you
want? Nothing. It’s crazy.” For Martina, the roles of mother and wife diminished her personal autonomy and took away from her identity, rather than adding to it. Lucas frames having children as a preference, and in relation to work: “It’s tough, but it’s black or white, which one you like. It’s all the effort and crying: times you spend studying for your career and doing what you’re doing now. Or [you could say] ‘forget everything that you did, I’m going to focus on my baby.’ So that’s the way I see it.” It seems that the idea of rationality and choice are important themes in Martina’s story, even though she didn’t use language of choice as she described her identity and family formation. Since her pregnancy occurred when she was making bad decisions as part of her youth, she felt that it did not count. It wasn’t a rational decision to have a child. In her current identity and understanding of reproduction, she separates herself from her youth.

In sum, there is considerable grey area in the way that participants conceptualize parenthood and what I am calling voluntarily childless. Parenthood does not rely solely on biological relatedness. Moreover, one can move back and forth along the continuum as a part of one’s life course and as a part of one’s identity management. These categories are flexible and permeable. Adriana’s and Teresa’s narratives exemplify a broader trend in my research: that people do not necessarily commit to only one category throughout a life course. As we will see in the rest of the chapter, reproductive narratives are employed in similar ways for both parents and voluntarily childless.

My Marriage is Different than My Parents’

Anthropologist Jennifer Hirsch (2003, 16) “did not set out to explore gendered modernity in Mexican families, and [her] research only shifted in this direction because of women’s and men’s insistent claims that they were not like their parents.” Similarly, I was struck by participants’ continual assertion of difference between their marriages and those of their parents.
and grandparents. Whether they were immigrants or not, this theme persisted. Looking at my
data in combination with Hirsch’s (2003) work with Mexican and Mexican American couples
and Williams’ (1990) work with professional class Mexican Americans, the trend of asserting
oneself as less traditional than one’s parents, especially in terms of the idea of the dominant
father, has spanned decades now. Of course, these assertions are filtered through cultural ideals,
so even though some of the population has an absent father, that typically is not the focus of
discussion.

Many participants in my study contrasted their marriages with the more “traditional”
Latin American marriages of their parents.\(^4\) The theme of modernity as contrasted with
“traditional” is not one that I went looking for, but rather one that emerged throughout my
interviews. Participants brought it up when I asked participants to describe fatherhood and
motherhood, to describe their childhoods, and if they saw change over generations. They
typically framed a traditional family as one with a patriarchal head and wife who remained in the
domestic sphere, managing the household and raising the children. Some were describing their
parents’ lives as traditional peasant farmers in Mexico. But others used these same designations
for families of a variety of class statuses and urban/rural positions. So this designation was not
strictly tied to social location, but rather to a generational ideal. Gloria a thirty-one-year-old,
second generation Mexican American describes the gender divide in her parents’ traditional
(“old-fashioned”) Latino/a household:

My parents had more of an old-fashioned type of situation going on. My dad was the one
that worked, and my mom was the homemaker. She raised the four of us, I guess sort of
on her own. My father was there, but he was always working, so I never really had my
father sit down with me to help me with my homework. My dad never went to my
brother’s baseball game because he was always working, because he was head of
household. And I remember being a teenager, and I was already working ‘cause in my

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\(^4\) Some participants of Mexican descent noted the “traditional” model of their parents’ marriages as specifically
Mexican, rather than Latin American.
household, it was where, “Hey do you want nice things? Get a job.” So as a teenager, we all started working when we were fifteen. There was, like, dirty dishes in the sink or something, and my dad’s like “wash the dishes, help your mom.” And I’m like, “well, I didn’t even eat, so how about my brothers do it?” There was three guys in the house. “It’s a girl’s job,” he’d say. So [I would say] “maybe I’ll quit my job, then, and you pay for everything because if the men are the only ones supposed to work, why am I working too?” That’s when I rebelled, according to [my parents]. There’s way worse things to rebel with. [laughs] I would get upset with my brothers, walking around the house without t-shirts on, outraged because, why didn’t my dad tell them to put a shirt on? Things like that. But that’s when I was older. When I was younger, I felt like, maybe that’s how it’s supposed to be. But it wasn’t until I met other people and saw other things that I realized that’s not really a typical thing.

Many participants, both parents and childless, invoked their parents’ “traditional” marriages as a way to assert their identity as modern. They also went to great lengths to make clear that they were not belittling their parents’ style of marriage, instead insisting that since that style of marriage worked for them, it was good. But they would not want that in their own marriages. In this way, participants could assert themselves as modern, while also valuing their parents’ marriages.

Almost all participants describe their marriages as partnerships, a relationship that scholars often refer to as a “companionate marriage.” Companionate marriage is now the most popular form of marriage in Mexico and among Mexican immigrants in the United States (Hirsch 2003). Companionate marriage centers on ideas of romantic love, compatibility, and partnership. Unlike in marriages based on respeto, it is not imperative that a partner come from a good family or that she/he fulfill certain gendered roles. Instead, compatibility and emotion are leading factors. Almost all of the partnerships in my study adhered to this model to some extent, which was not surprising. Though this may also be, in part, due to a smaller number of older participants in the study. For example, Robert, a fifty-three-year-old Latino man whose family had deep roots in Texas, describes his marriage:
Robert prefers to work together with his wife to accomplish household tasks. He sees their marriage as a give-and-take, rather than one divided along gender lines with power differences.

One participant, Maria, immigrated from Mexico to the United States at age thirty and was sixty-two at the time of the interview. Of all of the participants, her narrative most closely resembles an older form of marriage based on *respeto* (respect) (Hirsch 2003). This means that her marriage is based on duty, respect, and each partner fulfilling roles to support each other. She met her Anglo husband in Mexico, as he was living and working there in the agriculture industry. His first wife could not have children, and she feels that he married her, in part, because he believed a Mexican woman would want, and be able to give him, children. However, it is important to note that he did not express this sentiment in his interview. Nevertheless, Maria felt intense pressure to have children in this marriage. She reports the difference in her American in-laws’ relative lack of concern over her fertility with her Mexican family’s, saying that her family constantly asked if she was pregnant.

Maria and her husband Tom had their children while living in Mexico, and she felt that the most important way she could show that she was a part of Mexican society was to have
children. She explains that since only men can pass property down the family line, it was imperative to have children in order to gain respect as a mother. Moreover, she felt that if she did not have children with her husband, there were other women who would. Having children would disincentivize her husband from straying, though she said that it was no guarantee.

Maria’s role as a mother was not as she imagined it would be. She remembered growing up with a close-knit family; she attributes this to her grandmother’s Jewish identity and residence in a Jewish ghetto in Mexico. She said:

[I] always thought that if you marry, you would want to stay around your parents. You would look at house and job close to your family instead of having your own goals and going all over the world. Or, like, my son. He stayed close, but has his own life. Totally different than what we have. If we went to church every week…that didn’t happen. And of course, when they marry, it’s like a complete separation. As well as if you don’t have children, miss the fun, miss the responsibilities, get all this money for you. But then you would [be seen] by society like a lonesome couple, but you are lonesome anyway. In fact, they keep on taking away from you, constantly. And they want everything without giving you anything. But I did the same. I did exactly the same. So motherhood was a disappointment to me. At the end of the day, I don’t have what I want. And my Godmother had seven children, six boys and a girl. All of them live in Puebla. But she says, “none of them come and see me because they are so busy. My house was only full on Christmas, that’s it. They never came and have a meal every so often.” Like the Kennedys, that was the ideal family. And Jacqueline Kennedy [would] say, “oh I hate that we have to go eat at my mother-in-law’s house every day.” Because Rose Kennedy wanted to have all her children all the time. That was kind of exceptional; I don’t think that happens [often]. To me, if I would not have [had] to surrender to society to belong to society, to be looked and respected by society for having children, I would not have had children. They are a lot of trouble for nothing in return. That’s terrible, nobody says that. [laughs]

Maria says that part of the difference could be that she moved to the United States, but she also includes the above example of her Godmother in Mexico, indicating that mothering can be unfulfilling in both locations.

Maria admits that as she became an adult, she ultimately had to do what was right for her. So she was disappointed, but understanding, when her children grew up and moved away; even the one who lives in D/FW is not as physically or emotionally close to her as she would like. She
did not get the social rewards and emotional satisfaction from motherhood that she wanted. She pinpoints education as the difference. She feels that the price of having one’s children around is for them to remain uneducated, and she did not want to pay that price. Now, Maria feels that she is an independent person. However, this does not mean that household decisions are made by consensus in their marriage. Rather, important decisions are made unilaterally, where one person is passionate enough about the issue (moving, going back to school, etc.) to assert it to the other one. This stands in contrast to the rest of my participants, whose marriages—to varying degrees—could be described as companionate marriage.

While Hirsch’s (2003) participants assert their marriages as not only different, but better than their parents’ and grandparents’ “traditional” marriages, often based on respeto, my participants temper their responses. The only times I heard people speak negatively about their parents’ marriage was when a father was abusive and/or had substance abuse issues. Most commonly, participants framed their parents’ relationships as “different” than their own, and in doing so, assert their modern identities through their style of marriage (see also: Gutmann 1996; Hirsch 2003). Participants argued that they would not make the choice to have a marriage like their parents or grandparents have/had, but that it worked for them, so it was not better or worse than their companionate marriage. This framing mirrors the ways that some veins of popular American discourse has addressed issues of diversity more generally. It is a common refrain about a variety of personal choices made by others: not better or worse, just different. Some, especially conservative politicians, may refer to this as “moral relativism” (Merritt 2016). However, this is most commonly employed when someone disagrees with the choice. This could be something as trivial as a haircut or as wide-ranging as political party identity. Avoiding judgment of others’ personal lifestyle decisions is generally seen as a way to be modern, tolerant,
and even progressive, in contemporary American culture. Another possible interpretation of this format is that participants are working within a cultural value of *familismo*, based on family closeness and family loyalty. By avoiding a value judgement of their parents, participants are able to portray their marriage in a positive light without speaking negatively about their parents.

Irene, a fourth-generation Mexican American, describes her grandmother, who raised her when she was very young. She speaks of how her grandmother was raised with traditional values, including a focus on the domestic sphere. When Irene thinks about this lifestyle, she concludes: “It’s not bad; it’s just different. It’s a different time. And I’d rather hire someone to do that [cook and clean].” She does not disparage her grandmother’s roles, but rather indicates they are just not something she likes or is interested in.

Some mothers in the sample took a different approach, maintaining their identities as modern women, but tempering it with “traditional” ideals of femininity. These women value their companionate marriages, but also romanticize and bemoan the loss of the traditional homemaker roles in contemporary American and Latin cultures. This is distinct from the common off-handed comment that participants wish they knew more of the recipes that their grandmothers made; that I understand as a simple statement of nostalgia and comfort. However, three mothers in the sample also talked about how they wish their marriages and their children could be raised more traditionally. Continuing with Irene as an example, she said she didn’t have it in her to commit to domestic work in the way she sees her mother-in-law continue to care for her husband. For example, she still buys his underwear and brings over home-cooked meals. Emilie, a second-generation Mexican American who we met through her husband, Robert, earlier in the chapter also explicitly values traditional gender roles. She continually lobbies for household chores to be divided along gender lines and wants to make sure her twin girls are
raised as feminine girls, worrying that if they are raised to be too confident and independent that they will have trouble finding husbands in the future. Her husband, Robert, disagrees and takes time to teach them traditionally masculine life skills, such as car maintenance, so that they will not have to depend on anyone for their health and safety.

In these couples, men often espoused more gender egalitarian attitudes than their wives, especially in how they raised their female children, insisting they need to be able to provide for themselves. In addition to the example of Robert (described above), Chase, a forty-eight-year-old who grew up on the Texas-Mexico border, told me that part of his job as a father to his teenage daughter is to teach her to take risks and to be independent. He wants to make sure she can support herself and rely on herself as she grows up. He saw his four older sisters marry young and wonders what they could have accomplished “if they had a little more independence.” Chase also said that he had many childhood friends (both male and female) who “never left where they were because of fear of the unknown,” and he wants his daughter to have more options than that.

The women in these relationships long for what they see as the simplicity of a traditional marriage arrangement. Of course, they also entered into companionate marriages with men who espoused the importance of their wives’ education and goals, so this fantasy remains just that. They have ambivalent feelings about gender and seem to feel caught between two conflicting ideals about women’s roles. For example, as Emile told me that she believes in traditional gender roles, she followed with “I say that tongue-in-cheek because I’m also telling you I’m not a rib.” Here, she refers to earlier in our discussion, where she described her difficulties with the Catholic Church and its gender-based hierarchy, where the man is the head and the woman is the rib. This suggests to me that even though the women in this group are not actively seeking
modern identities, they also hold some characteristics of modernity and modern gender roles to be important to them and their lives. It is also worth noting that only three women in my sample fit into this category.

“Choice”

Women often obliquely brought up the idea of choice before they were even part of my project. When I was screening women for inclusion as voluntarily childless,50 participants often asked, “do I count?” if they had not undergone infertility treatment. “How hard do I have to try to become a mother before I am considered voluntarily childless? If I wanted a child and didn’t conceive, but did not go through infertility treatments, does that mean I chose not to have children?” I heard some form of this question from many women as I met them and discussed my project. In other words, they were asking “at what point did I make a choice?” They were clearly expressing to me that ideas and identities surrounding reproduction changed over their lives. Previous desires to be a mother may not have lead them down paths toward infertility diagnoses/treatments or adoption. If they did not sink everything they had into becoming a mother, did it count that they made a choice? If they felt they had made a choice not to seek treatment, does that mean that they had made a definitive choice not to mother, or did they have to make that choice from the start?

In my interviews, I avoided the language of choice/choose/choosing, as I was unsure if this would be a salient concept for participants. Do they see reproduction as something that is easily controlled and intentionally directed? A little less than half of my individual participants (7 out of 16) used these words to describe reproductive decision-making, evenly split across men and women (3 women, 4 men). However, most of the people using these words to describe

50 See Chapter 4 for inclusion/exclusion criteria.
reproduction were born in the United States (5 out of 7). This suggests to me that American
cultural ideas about reproductive choice are part of this framing. While public health campaigns
around reproduction that focus on the idea of choice are present in Latin America, and many, but
not all, are aimed at lowering birth rates, they are top-down enterprises, not necessarily
employing culturally salient frameworks. For example, I have seen this play out in public health
programs in rural Mexico, where there are state-sponsored maternal health programs that bring
public health educators into rural communities and reward women for attending clinic and
classes (Lott 2007; see also Sargent and Bascope 1996; Jordan 1992). However, women and lay
midwives resented these health workers, as they spoke against many common and culturally-valued practices in a way that made people feel talked-down to. In short, the largely Western-inspired biomedical approach was at odds with rural Mexicans’ understanding of fertility and reproduction.

In the realm of reproductive decisions and negotiations, the idea of choice can be a
complicated one. American culture tends to focus on individuality and emphasizes people’s
choices; this carries over into the realm of reproduction. However, the feminist movement and a
health consumers’ movement have also developed the idea of reproductive choice as part of the
American framing of reproduction (Lazarus 1994). “Choice” can be a loaded idea in some
reproductive contexts (such as abortion access or surrogacy) but is often less loaded in its more
abstracted sense. American framing of reproduction as a choice aligns with the “rational man” or
rational actor typically valued in Western culture. Townsend (2010) found that for American
fathers, there was a sense that fertility was something relatively easily controlled, that children
were planned for.
There is also a cultural assumption that women who are mothers planned for and want their children (Wilson 2014). However, in the United States, almost half (45%) of pregnancies are unintended (Finer and Zolna 2016). Of course, this is not evenly distributed among the population. Rates of unintended pregnancy declined for all groups in the United States between 2008 and 2011, but Latinos/as had the sharpest decrease: 25%. However, all ethnic and racial groups (controlled for income) all have higher rates of unintended pregnancy than Anglos. During the same period, Finer and Zolna (2016) found that those with higher incomes and higher educational attainment had lower rates of unintended pregnancy (a strong inverse association).

Children come into one’s life in a variety of ways, and ideas about parenting change over the life course. To what extent is the assumption of fertility as controllable true for voluntarily childless Latinos/as? Can we accurately use the word “choice” in this context? If not, what concept(s) and word(s) should we use?

Structural issues may also limit the ability of any woman to freely choose to have children. Morrell (1994) sums up some of the gendered issues at stake:

In both directions, choices are in some sense forced. Women cannot make “free” choices to be mothers in an environment which encourages and enforces reproduction; neither can women “freely” choose to remain childless when the unrelieved pressures of parenthood fall on the shoulders of women without adequate supporters. Simply said, maternalism interferes with the reproductive autonomy of women. (12)

In other words, since women always make reproductive choices in a cultural context and in relation to hierarchies of power, they are never able to truly make a choice based solely on their own preferences. They are always compromising in some way; in this example, American pronatalism creates burdens for women, no matter what choice they make.

Am I Ready?
The idea of readiness, being (or not being) ready for children, came up frequently for voluntarily childless participants as a way to frame their reproductive decisions. Sometimes it was used to describe their choice without other context; sometimes it was used as a way to counter pressures from family (“I’m not ready yet”). I performed a “key word in context” analysis using MAXQDA (Stone et al 1966)\(^51\) for the term “ready” and then eliminated any segments where “ready” did not refer to reproduction. The term shows up in the reproductive narratives of 75% of voluntarily childless participants (both men and women). In other words, the framing of “ready” is quite common for participants in this project.

The idea of “readiness” is present in the literature on reproduction in the United States. Townsend’s (2010) study of American men and fathering employs the idea of readiness as a “psychological state” that is not necessarily a prerequisite for having children\(^52\)(89). A man may feel ready or not ready at the birth of his first child. Townsend found that some men’s lack of readiness after the birth of a child caused anxiety for them and stress in their marriage. Others felt ready before their wives and tried to convince their wives it was time to have a child. Some men only felt ready when their children were older, and the men felt they could relate to them. He notes that in all of these scenarios, women were still the mediating figure in fatherhood. However, men’s use of a cultural script also dictated an age bracket in which it was appropriate to have children, where they were old enough to be ready, but not too old to enjoy their children.

In Gregory’s (2012) study of women who have children later in life (after 35), she found that these women consistently reported feeling “ready” to have children. They had a chance to establish themselves personally and professionally, to attain a level of financial stability, and to

\(^{51}\) For more details on this data analysis technique, see Chapter 4
\(^{52}\) He draws from an unpublished dissertation in anthropology on middle-class white women’s reproduction (Leone 1986) in developing this argument.
find a steady partner (or come to terms with single parenthood). They felt a shift from focusing to their own development to their children’s. Importantly, women now have more control over their fertility than in the past, which gives them more control over sequencing their life events. Gregory’s account is a generally optimistic one, and she reports that women who have children after thirty-five see their decision as a profoundly positive one. She does not address how participants might use narratives to create culturally and personally acceptable stories of their lives.

Reading these studies together is useful context for my findings. Gregory asserts that women have not always had the technology or cultural permission to sequence events in their life course, but when they do, they wait until they feel ready. This dovetails with Townsend’s argument that women play mediating roles between men and their children, since he found that men’s “readiness” did not necessarily coincide with when they became fathers.

What is Ready?

Most of my participants who used the concept of choice to frame their narratives also discussed the idea of being “ready” or “not ready.” However, this was more common among voluntarily childless participants than parents. They often framed themselves as “not ready” for children and think they probably never will be. Or they employ “not ready” as part of extended periods of reproductive negotiation. Elizabeth and her husband, Raul, spent years negotiating the idea of having children. Elizabeth is a thirty-nine-year-old voluntarily childless woman, a third-generation American with Mexican heritage. She sees “readiness” as central to the couple’s negotiations:

I always knew I wanted to get married. But I was not one of those young ladies or teenage girls that said I want to get married, I want to have this many kids by the time I’m twenty-five, and [so on]. So just getting married – that was the goal I had in mind.

53 See Chapter 6 for more on negotiation.
[My husband and I] talked about kids, and [my husband] said a lot depends on you and what you want to do and career, so why don’t we give it some time? We were both in our late twenties, so let’s see, [we should] give it a couple of years to enjoy being married and finish school and [then] revisit and see how we feel when I turn thirty. [he would be thirty-three at this point] We weren’t really ready to make a go/no go when my birthday came around, so we pushed it another year or two. So finally, around thirty-two or thirty-three, said yeah, I think we’re pretty good. We’re good where we are.

Sometimes at these dates, Elizabeth and her husband did not feel ready to have a discussion, so it would be pushed back. Other times, they did not feel ready for children yet, so the date would get pushed back. Reasons included that she was not done with her education or that she had not advanced in her career as much as she wanted to. The date was continually pushed back until they both reached a threshold of “ready,” where they made what they consider their final decision: not to have children. She says this was ultimately because she wanted to maintain a lifestyle that she enjoys. However, Raul recounts the story with less back-and-forth, explaining that they “were both on the same wavelength,” but agreeing that they had short discussions about the issue.

Financially Ready

A basic issue for many was financial readiness. Can the couple afford to have children? The idea of what is affordable is subjective and culturally framed. Participants who did not use the frame of “ready” sometimes brought up the saying “there is no good time to have a baby.” In other words, if one waits for conditions to be perfect before having a baby, then one will never have a baby; perfect conditions do not exist. Children cost money, and no one truly knows their financial future. The “ready” framing is in opposition to this attitude. It argues that if children are expensive, then one should be on track to have enough money before having them. However, the problem is that the idea of “enough” is also subjective and culturally framed.
Part of middle-class identity is the fear of falling to a lower class (Ehrenreich 1989). So, for the middle class, financially ready or having “enough money” for a child means being reasonably sure that the family can maintain its economic and social status while preparing the next generation to meet or exceed the middle class. For example, Miguel is a thirty-one-year-old who migrated from Mexico with his family as a child. He told me that he wants to wait to have children until he and his wife have the financial means to put them in a good school. His goal is to “give [his future children] the tools to be someone.” He anticipates that he would soon meet that requirement. Realistically, this is no small task. The United States Government estimates that a child born in a middle-income family in 2015 will cost $233,610 to raise through the age of 17, a 3% price jump from the previous year’s estimates (Lino et al. 2017). This estimate does not include college tuition or time costs and foregone earnings and career opportunities, so the true cost for a middle-class family is typically much higher. Middle-class participants are aware of high costs of education for children, in particular. But, of course, the cost of raising a child in the middle class is not the cost of raising a child in the United States. Conceivably, most of the participants in this study would have had “enough” money to be parents long before they were “ready,” if they were willing to compromise or risk their middle-class status or if they spent less money on their children. Those with less money spend less on children, on average, and after the first child, the per-child cost tends to be less (Lino et al. 2017).

The “cost” of children is not a universal concern, nor is it necessarily so in the United States. Pricing the Priceless Child (Zelizer 1994) shows that by the early 1900s, children had become economically worthless, but emotionally priceless. As children were sacralized, they were set above financial considerations. More recently, Valenti (2012, 14) argues that parenting in America “is about creating someone to love us unconditionally, someone on which to focus all
of our energy and love.” However, for many in the middle-class, their “fear of falling” means that they do think of children in financial terms, at least in hind sight; participants often say they are glad they did not have more children than they already do because of the cost. The idea of financial readiness here has to do with having “enough” money to provide high-quality (and often high-cost) childhoods without fear of downward class mobility.

Emotionally Ready

Others conceptualized being ready as an emotional state. It is now common for people to have children for emotional fulfillment and companionship (see above). Moreover, parenting, in part due to the ideal of intensive mothering, means more than keeping children alive. It also means being able to attend to children’s emotional needs. Gloria, a thirty-one-year-old second generation Mexican American said:

I do want to have children, but not right now or in the immediate future. I just feel like there’s this huge responsibility in taking care of a child. I personally don’t think I would be able to provide them with what they need in regards to the emotional part of raising kids. In terms of everything else: shelter, water, yeah, I could do that. But the actual raising a child to make sure that they’re good human beings, as of right now, ugh, I don’t want to do it. I also think it’s because we have so many plans for us as a couple to travel, our professions, the business, the learning from each other about each other, that having a child right now might not be the best move.

Gloria understands mothering as an activity that requires emotional maturity. Her discussion also echoes Gregory’s (2012) findings on “ready” for older mothers: it is important to mature and develop enough as a person before having a child so that the woman can switch focus from personal development to the child’s development.

Participants also worry about being mature enough to have a child. Maturity is an amorphous concept, one that point to having enough life experience to properly raise a child. Carmen, a thirty-eight-year-old, second generation Mexican American woman describes her idea of maturity and parenting:
I’m one of the very few women who truly and deeply thinks about the responsibility of having a child and if I did not think in such detail of having a child, I would have several already. I think about not so much myself. In fact, I have said this. It’s because that child hasn’t been born yet, because I want the best possible things for this child and because I am not prepared to give this child what he or she deserves. My choice, I’m bringing a human being into this world, unasked. The child hasn’t asked to be born, and so I can be fulfilled and comply with the social expectations, I go and have a child. Then not so much financially supporting this child, but being a mature mom – am I a wise mother? Am I a loving, caring mother? Have I overcome all my insecurities as a human being and as a woman to then take care of this child? Or am I going to be competing with this child and this child’s father for love and support? So when I do bring this child into this world, I want this child to know that he or she has been so loved and expected and anticipated for many, many years. That I’ve gone through a number of ordeals so I am ready, I am ready to bring this child because it’s a gift of life that I am giving to this child, but give this child a safe environment, a safe experience and the most amazing human experience that this child can ever have as my son or daughter. And that’s how I think.

Carmen envisions mothering as something best accomplished by someone who has endured enough hardships in life and has gained enough wisdom to parent from a place of wisdom.

Another theme in emotional readiness, especially for women, was the theme of pleasure. Sometimes this refers to sexual pleasure; other times it is the pleasure of sleeping in on Saturday. Anthony Giddens argues that personal relationships and self-identity (1991) are an important part of understanding modernity and that sexual pleasure and intimacy have long played important roles in the development of modernity (2013). Experiences of pleasure are also tied into the importance of consumer culture in the middle-class. Women discussed both kinds of pleasure as ways to reinforce their rhetorics of readiness and choice. Elizabeth, who helped introduce us to the idea of readiness a few pages ago, describes how maintenance of lifestyle is part of her decision to not have children:

Part of it is a lifestyle choice, whether you call it being selfish or not. Both Raul [husband] and I have kids who we love, but we don’t have a strong desire to have our own. Like, traveling, having nice things, doing things spur of the moment—for example, one time we bought playoff finals tickets last minute and just decided to go away for the weekend—if we had kids, we couldn’t do that. So the ability to buy things and do things somewhat factors into that […] That selfishness of sleep and doing what we want to do
when we want to do it. In some ways, a different kind of stress in our life. A lifestyle of not having to put our kids’ needs before ours.

Elizabeth tells me that she enjoys having nice things and spending time with her husband, also through the ability to be a consumer. In this way, she is reflecting the fear of downward mobility associated with the middle class, as well as the fear of the cost of childrearing. She says her pleasure is an important part of her life, asserting her modern individual identity and values. However, she also tempers this narrative by acknowledging that others would label this as selfish, as being unwilling to share of herself and her resources by parenting.

*Is “Ready” a “Must?”*

The bar for “ready” is not the same for all participants. However, the feeling of ready and the notion that one “should” be ready before having a child is common. Ready was not a prerequisite for having children, but was an understood part of the reproductive life narratives of many participants. Voluntarily childless couples in particular mobilized the idea of “ready” in discussing others. Many held the view that just having a child wasn’t something to be proud of: after all, it is simply a biological process. Instead, waiting to be truly ready before having a child was the true accomplishment to be recognized.

Participants used the idea of “ready” in various ways in the structures of their narratives. Here, I focused on the relationship among the concepts of choice, readiness, and modernity. However, in the next chapter, I will revisit this concept in the context of pressure from family members and reproductive negotiation. Participants also use the idea of “not ready” to deflect family members’ pressure to reproduce. Despite use of intention-driven ideas such as readiness and choice, reproduction was not necessarily understood as something easily controllable. Elements of the unknown were often taken into consideration.
Choice, Fate, and God

Though participants often explicitly use the lens of choice in their reproductive narratives, it is frequently tempered with themes that show reproduction as something out of one’s control. Narratives of choice and fate often intertwine in the same narrative. Reproduction is not considered controllable or uncontrollable, but rather a process that encompasses both. This is especially true over the life course, where different framings are more salient at different points. Moreover, looking back at one’s life and looking forward at one’s future, different framings may be used to help understand and organize one’s life as well.

Consider Adriana again. She uses “choice” and fate—as framed through “God’s will”—to understand different parts of her narrative. When she decided to have her first child, she did not hesitate to frame it as a definite choice. She had specific reasons she made that choice: “I know what inspired me.” She points to specific events, such as her friend’s pregnancy, and has a narrative to explain it. However, she also feels that since the timing was not exactly planned and was due to a lapse between birth control prescriptions that, “I think I felt like God wants me to be a mom, and that’s the reason why this happened, because God knows what he is doing and wants this for us.” When I asked Adriana if she would have more children in the future, she said that she did not know. At the time of the interview, Adriana’s daughter was seven months old, so she had not yet turned her attention to future issues of family formation. She felt that since she was exclusively breastfeeding her daughter, she didn’t need to worry about birth control. When I pushed her, asking if future family planning would again be her choice she corrected me, saying: “it’s gonna be up to God. If He blesses us with more children, I will take as many as He gives us.”
Several participants (including Adriana) invoke the idea of having the children that God gives them, but I did not understand them to mean it literally. They are people who also employ birth control and speak of family planning and choice. They bristle at being called religious and do not attend church regularly. Rather, they use the word spiritual and embrace religion as a personal practice. They do not mean this in the way their grandparents might have. Instead, they see themselves as modern, middle-class Americans, manipulating fertility so that women, in particular, could reach their educational and professional potential. However, they do not discount the role of the unexpected or the idea that God may guide them in their lives. They do not see their ability to assert themselves as modern, rational women as contradictory to their cultural and religious backgrounds. Rather, they went hand-in-hand.

The idea of fate functions similarly for parents who see having children as a given. For this group, one grows up, gets married, and has children; there is no question of “if” any of this will happen. These participants were often confused in the interview when I asked them how they knew they wanted children or when they felt it was time to get married. They understand children as an inevitable part of life. Six participants fell into this category, and some coupled it with language surrounding choice. For example, Michelle, a forty-three-year-old migrant from Mexico, has both a sense of choice and a sense of inevitability with reproduction. When she was single, she didn’t want children:

I was very selfish. I was like, “no, I’m not changing diapers. No, I’m not going to feed anybody.” I didn’t want to get married. Then I met [my husband] and I was like, OK, maybe I do want to get married. Then we got married and I had sex and I thought “oh, maybe I want kids. I want to keep doing this!” [laughs] And you know, according to the Catholic [Church], you have sex because you’re going to have children; you can’t just have sex just for the fun of it. Then after my first kid, I found out you can have sex just for the fun of it! Like, OK, just one more and then we’re done.

When I asked her why marriage was a point when she changed her mind, she responded:
I was always taught that you work, you get married, you have children. That’s life. If you don’t, it’s like you’re not complete, you’re not filled, you’re not done. So we knew that. We knew that we were gonna get married. I didn’t want kids. Just because I was selfish; I wanted me time. But when I got married, I started realizing that yah, we do need to fill this family. I would love to have part of my husband [by having children with him].

For Michelle, deviating from the expected life course, where one has children would have been selfish. Choosing not to have children would mean thinking only of oneself, choosing frivolities over duty. She knew, especially after she was married, that children were inevitable. She draws from cultural and religious messages to form this idea. However, she also felt that she had agency to make choices in her reproductive life course.

God was almost always invoked to explain children, rather than a lack of children. The idea that children are a gift from God came up frequently, and women who wanted to be mothers sometimes reported praying to God for children. God’s will was also invoked as a reason for unplanned pregnancies or pregnancies that happened earlier or later than originally intended. Occasionally, parents would say that it would be up to God if they had another child. The way that God’s plan was used to explain absence of children only happened a few times in a specific circumstance; when recounting an infant’s death or a stillborn child, participants sometimes used the euphemism of God taking the babies to be with Him.

When describing reasons for not having children, participants were more likely to use secular phrases, such as “was not meant to be” to describe not having children. I argue that this is because of the strong links between God’s plan and being blessed with children, which confirms the assumed life plan for many (and certainly in the eyes of the Catholic Church): marriage and children. However, most invoked the idea of fate or God in terms of the future. Most of those who are childless pragmatically admit that no one truly knows what the future holds, so fate may make them parents in unexpected ways (for example, the need to parent a Godchild in the event
of a tragedy). Moreover, many who are childless are in an extended period of reproductive uncertainty, so they are keeping the door open in the future for children. So, if they invoke fate or God, it is terms of possibilities in the future. As the next section will show, if participants contemplate the use of ARTs, the language of choice is reinforced in reproductive narratives.

**Choices around Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) and Adoption?**

“Assisted reproductive technologies” (ARTs) is an umbrella term for technologies used to achieve pregnancy, such as medication, in vitro fertilization, or surrogacy. These technologies are normalized in the United States, and increasingly in Latin America. IVF became part of the mainstream American culture by using the language of “choice” to frame the new technologies (Marsh and Ronner 1999). Gonzalez-Santos (2016) shows in her history of assisted reproduction in Mexico that ARTs have become steadily less controversial since the 1970s, with over fifty clinics in the country now. Although the Catholic Church does not condone reproductive technologies, most Mexicans identify as popular Catholics and understand God as playing a part in reproductive technologies (Braff 2013). Moreover, in recent years, the Catholic Church has had less moral legitimacy in Mexico due to scandals (Amuchástegui et al. 2010). However, services are limited and often only offered to heterosexual married couples.\(^\text{54}\) Part of the success of ARTs in Mexico is due to advertising campaigns by private clinics, where their services are shown as part of established gender roles and kinship bonds (González-Santos 2016). Despite that fact, Latinos/as have a generally low use of ART services in the United States (Feinberg et al. 2007). It also seems that this is not an artifact of income inequality. For example, in a study in the Department of Defense, where employees all have access to ARTs services, what the authors call an “equal-access-to-care” setting, there was a disproportionately low use of ART services

\(^{54}\) Only serving heterosexual couples is part of an ethical code that clinicians in Latin America are supposed to agree to (Luna 2002).
(Feinberg et al 2007). This bore out in my study, as only two out of my thirty-five participants underwent any infertility treatment (both women): one took ovary stimulating medication, but stopped short of more invasive procedures; one underwent laparoscopy for endometriosis, but said that it was primarily for treatment of pain. However, as I allude to at the beginning of this section on choice, infertility treatment frequently came up as a topic of discussion. Women, in particular, often discuss it as a hypothetical, including it as a possibility for their futures or as an alternate timeline in their lives. In this way, ARTs and adoption are part of how participants understand and frame reproduction in terms of their life course.

Moreover, changing patterns of reproduction have also changed relationships with reproductive technologies. A strategy wherein couples remain childless is repeated indecision about reproduction. This, coupled with the statistical increased delay in age of first child, pushes women into later ages for reproduction, when infertility is more likely. The availability of ARTs and adoption (combined with more flexible cultural ideas of family and kinship) has made delayed parenting possible, but has also meant that more women are contending with these decisions, no matter their point of view when they were younger (wanted to be mothers or not). Moreover, new technologies “up the stakes” for infertile and childless people (Wilson 2014), and ARTs increase pronatalist social pressures (Agigian 2004; Harwood 2007; Sandelowski 1991).

When speaking to women about inclusion in my study, a vein of questioning arose: can I be considered voluntarily childless if I did not pursue infertility treatment? This was a question women brought up when we were discussing the parameters of my study.55 Moreover, my interview questions did not specifically ask participants about infertility, ARTs, or adoption; all data on these topics came up for participants during their reproductive narratives. Women were

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55 At the recruitment stage, I was almost exclusively speaking with women. For more on this, see Chapter 3.
more likely to discuss these issues than men, but some men did discuss these topics. During interviews, these women gave various reasons for not following that path. Some told me that “Mexicans” or “Latinos” didn’t use assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) or adoption because it’s “a cultural thing.” They tended to stop the conversation there; it was so obvious that it did not deserve an explanation. However, a few allude to Catholicism as part of this cultural belief. Others explain a simple lack of desire to pursue this path, a resistance to the emotionally, physically, and financially draining process of infertility treatment, or the costs and bureaucracy of the adoption process.

It is important to note that infertility is established through submission to medical testing and procedures: medicalization (Wilson 2014: Letherby 2002). Without medicalization, a person does not obtain the status or identity of infertile. Women who would be labeled infertile in a clinical setting can also be voluntarily childless (Connidis and McMullin 1996; Jeffries and Konnert 2002), and infertile women who seek treatment are in the minority (Wilson 2014). As pregnancy, birth, and infertility are all reproductive stages that are often medicalized, we can see voluntarily childless women as resisting medicalization. Women were typically vague in their descriptions of why they did not go down this path, giving general reasons such as “it just didn’t feel right” or “it was something we didn’t pursue, but I’m not sure why.”

Participants do not typically use words such as infertile or infertility to describe their own reproductive journey, regardless of ability or inability to conceive. Instead, avoidance of biomedical intrusions to obtain parenthood was often framed as lacking an intense desire to parent. Consider Claudia, a sixty-three-year-old childless woman who was born in Colombia and immigrated to the United States with her family at seven:

We really did not make a cognizant effort to have children. You know how a lot of people [think], “oh it’s not happening, oh it’s not happening” and you freak out? You go
to the doctors and you get on Clomid like all my friends did (some of my friends). And you stand on your head and, you know. We really didn’t do that. We just kind of assumed that it would happen. And then I think [my husband’s] and my nature, I would say we’re lazy, we’re kind of lazy, I must say. Because we really didn’t actively go and say “ok something is wrong here.” […] So, it just really didn’t happen, and, like I said, we weren’t dying to have children. We just thought they would come when they’re ready to get here. Before we knew it, we were close to forty. So it wasn’t [that we did not] really want kids, but we certainly didn’t have a passion for it and [didn’t take] the bull by the horns like other people do.

Claudia frames her and her husband’s decision to not pursue infertility diagnosis and treatment as partially explained by personality traits (“lazy”), partially due to their hectic lifestyle, and partially because they left it up to God. Moreover, she says “we didn’t have a passion [for becoming parents] and didn’t want [children] badly.”

Claudia understands medicalization—in this case, use of ARTs—to be more than a choice, but as the logical next step in one’s reproductive journey. However, for Claudia, as for many participants who had trouble conceiving, it is a hypothetical step, one they say they “should” have taken or one that is meant for someone else: someone more committed, perhaps, to an all-encompassing view of motherhood. I argue that idea stems from the ideal of intensive mothering (Hays 1998), an American cultural ideal where motherhood is an all-encompassing role. If mothering is such an important and intensive role, then it follows that the pursuit of it be equally taxing, if necessary. If we understand motherhood as a calling, then it makes cultural sense that intensive measures are warranted in the pursuit of it.

This point of view is almost certainly mediated by American middle-class identity, in particular its focus on consumerism (Ehrenreich 1989). Participants in this study could all likely afford use of ARTs56 and understood themselves as candidates in an abstract way. They have experience in medical settings as patient-consumers. Participants understand ARTs (along with

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56 See earlier discussion on “enough” money in section on financial readiness for more on the cultural construction of money and how it relates to class.
adoption) as options they may take, often in the context of extending their possible reproductive window as they experience extended periods of reproductive uncertainty. Participants imagine the possibilities as a way to the outer limits of their reproductive life course. However, they also resisted that next step for reasons they often had trouble articulating. Participants frame ARTs and adoption as wonderful opportunities…for other people. Or as something one does when they have a passion for the role of a parent.

So, “do we count?” Women asked me questions about if they chose motherhood and how far ones has to go, sometimes tinged with anxiety. This suggests an awareness of the American ideal of intensive mothering (Hays 1998) that frames the motherhood identity and practice as all-consuming, something to really “have a passion for.” In this cultural script, the next logical step after trying to conceive is to visit the doctor’s office and submit to increasingly medicalized approaches to conception. As I discussed my project with these women, they often came to the conclusion that they chose not to have children because they did not utilize ARTs or adoption. That was a choice they made; this language of choice, of course, was reinforced through cultural framing of medical technologies.

Conclusion

Participants used a rational rhetoric of choice and a linked conception of the psychological state of readiness as part of their framing of family formation as an active process. I identify this, in part, as a function of American and global discourses of modernity, especially as filtered through an American middle-class identity and American consumer culture. However, participants also embraced the unknown in their narratives, whether this is framed as secular ideas of fate, religious ideas of “God’s plan,” or cultural expectations around childbearing. By
combining these narratives, participants created a flexible framework of family formation that reflected their ethnic, cultural, and class-based identities.

These frameworks help participants navigate the contradictory reproductive pressures they experience surrounding gender, parenting, and class. In their narratives, they can assert their rational, modern identities and emphasize the element of intentional choice surrounding reproduction. It is important to remember that they are doing so in an American political and cultural context where Latinos/as are conflated with the lower-class, and Latina bodies and identities are used as emblems of that discourse. However, by intertwining narratives of choice with narratives that give place to fate, God’s will, and cultural assumptions about the inevitability of parenthood, they also incorporate ideas from religious faith, the importance of the family unit, and the complicated nature of reproductive negotiations.

Participants use their reproductive narratives to establish their place in their, sometimes complex, kinship networks. As is common in the United States, kin networks may include divorces, step-families, co-residence, and a variety of other household formations. Moreover, as participants are embedded in global contexts, their families are likely spread over the United States and across various countries. This also means that parenting roles and identities are malleable objects in these narratives. So as participants position themselves as parents (or not) within a kin group in their narratives, we get a glimpse of how they frame their choice to be parents (or not) in cultural context.

How participants shape their reproductive narratives helps us understand why they become parents, or not. Family formation is a place where participants assert their modern identities and, in the process, have small families commiserate with middle-class American expectations. Parenting, in this framework, becomes something to think through rationally and to
prepare for. However, when things do not go according to plan—or when the plan is a very loose one to begin with—God, fate, or a cultural sense of the inevitability of parenthood step in as a way to frame this exception. While participants discuss ARTs and adoption as possible paths to parenthood, they generally did not employ them. This is often because it is seen as something that is for other people, but not for them, whether articulated as a cultural norm or as a personality trait. In family planning, there are rational choices to be made, but they do not trump all else.

This chapter focused on participants’ conceptions of themselves as modern, as they are exhibited through discussions of participants’ marriages and reproductive narratives. It also illustrated the complexity of the categories of parent and childless and how one’s relationship to these ideas can shift over one’s life course. The next chapter takes up here, examining how participants’ narratives are situated in structures of gender and kinship.
Gloria, a thirty-one-year-old, second generation Mexican American without children, did not have clear discussions on a variety of topics before marrying her husband, even though they had been dating for seven years:

The children thing, I think when we were dating we would mention things like that, but even to this day there is no clear picture of yes or no: so it’s just kinda if it happens. I think we both have a good take on what our family means to us, like when our parents get older and how we might have to take of them, and I think we're a good match and culturally we’re a good match too in regards to that. But no, we did not have a sit-down and say, “Okay, this is all me and this is all you,” you know? But I think that’s helpful. [laughs]

Gloria and her husband did not discuss their reproductive goals before marriage, and now that they are three years into their marriage, they still have not talked about it. It was common for participants to marry without consensus (or even much discussion) about reproductive plans. Instead, participants tend to have long periods of reproductive uncertainty and negotiation with their partners.

In this chapter, I demonstrate relationships among gender, power, and kinship for my participants. I conceptualizes both gender and kinship as malleable, negotiable, and mutually constitutive. In this analysis, I understand reproduction as a site of contestation, where gender inequalities can be seen at various levels. I also understand gender and kinship links as actively negotiated in this space. The identities and roles of mother and father, wife and husband, are
negotiated in terms of gender and kinship. Moreover, it is common for couples to have long periods of reproductive uncertainty during which couples participate in gendered negotiations and women, in particular, face pressure to reproduce from family members. The result of these negotiations is that women most commonly have final say in reproductive negotiations.

Family

Participants mobilize the idea of family in several ways in this study. Participants were asked a variety of questions about family formation during interviews (see Appendix B). They were also asked to consider family formation in larger networks of kinship. Data for this discussion comes from various parts of participant narratives.

Family without Children?

The perceived normative family in the United States is a nuclear family including children. Moreover, given the centrality of the figure of the self-sacrificing mother (marianismo) and the importance of motherhood as a public identity in Latin America, children are also thought of as central to family in that context. However, this has started to shift. Blackstone and Greenleaf (2015) argue that in the United States, adults without children can be understood as family. Voluntarily childless families in their study fulfill the many functions of family that they considered, even though they are often considered grounded in the assumption of having children: emotional and sexual companionship, facilitating economic provision, providing a home, facilitating biological and social reproduction. However, instead of biological reproduction, the arrangement facilitates different kinds of social reproduction, such as caring for others’ children or working/volunteering to help children. Conversely, while definitions of family in the United States are malleable and shifting, Powell et al. (2010) found that fewer than 30% of Americans consider a couple without children to be a family.
Participants in my study mobilize the idea of family without children in a variety of ways. For example, Pilar, a fifty-two-year-old, second-generation Mexican American has two children with her husband, but emphasizes that she and her husband are family, even without their children. Similarly, Patricia, a forty-two-year-old Mexican American woman without children argued that even without children, that the mother is the essential family role. She said:

I feel that I’m a big support role in how our family is shaped. And I even say family as [my husband and myself] because we are each other’s family. And I guess I still, even though we don’t have children, I feel that the mother is the essential role because my mother was such a strong role model. I really feel like I have a lot of her traits and sensibilities. She was a very driven person that made things happen, and I feel like I’m the same way: I make things happen.

Patricia identifies her role in her home through personality similarities with her mother. She associates the ability to organize and mobilize the family unit as important for the woman in the family. However, as is often the case in interviews, the roles of wife and mother (or husband and father) are difficult to fully separate. They bleed into each other, and, for women in particular, are part of gender identity. The next section discusses gendered parenting and spousal roles in greater detail, zeroing in on these roles in the family structure.

Parenting

Mother and father are both kin roles and (especially for women) part of gender identity. They are shaped by a myriad of cultural and political forces, but also negotiated within a couple. Moreover, they can bolster or undercut status in a given family, community, or culture. Notably, parenting is a deeply gendered activity (Townsend 2010). This means that mothers and fathers do different things, but also that being a parent means different things to mothers and fathers. Moreover, motherhood (and fatherhood) often has different meanings for mothers and fathers. This section focuses on conceptions of parenting and gender as a way to better understand gendered negotiations of kinship and reproduction.
As part of interviews, I invited participants to describe their roles as wife, mother, husband, and/or father and their thoughts on each category. They often discussed roles of wife and mother (and husband and father) together, as they moved back and forth between them. The roles were not always clearly delineated, so I also discuss them as a unit in analysis when appropriate. This is the primary data used for this section. However, I contextualize and discuss these data within participants’ reproductive narratives.

Motherhood

Motherhood is both a role and identity for many women. It is often a desired social identity with increased status in many Latin American contexts, and it is an important component of womanhood for many women. Participants in my study most commonly associate motherhood with someone who is nurturing. When I looked at mother and wife roles, ten women specifically linked one or both of these roles to the household. In many ways, these are not surprising findings, as they reinforce both American and Latino/a “traditional” ideals of mothering. But how does this work for people who also assert themselves as modern individuals?

Nurturing

Eighteen participants (just over half) describe an important part of the mother role as nurturing. Both women and men, parents and voluntarily childless gave this response. Participants saw nurturing as a positive trait for women. Many understand it as a biologically-based trait, one that is “natural” for women. In this way, participants did not necessarily configure motherhood to be in conflict with the importance of professional identities for women. However, a mothering instinct could be used to nurture in a variety of ways. Participants understand an urge to mother as “natural,” implying a biological basis. However, nurturing could be employed to create kin links, a cultural act. Moreover, both mothers and voluntarily childless
women often emphasized the development of nurturing relationships outside of those with those biologically or socially labeled as their children. This underlines the importance of nurturing as the most commonly given characteristic or role of a mother.

Participants maintain relationships with children who are not theirs that are important to their lives and identities. This is more common with women than with men, though men did sometimes discuss caring relationships with others’ children. When men did bring this up, it was often in terms of their career. For example, Arturo, a forty-three-year-old third generation Mexican American, is a voluntarily childless man who is a school principal. He spoke of the children in his school as “his children.” He spends his days working to improve their lives and takes pride in mentoring some of them. Similarly, Adolfo, a thirty-three-year-old, third generation Mexican American who is voluntarily childless works with children in the field of speech language pathology. He enjoys working with children, but has found that sometimes parents are uncomfortable with a male working with their children. He feels this is in part because of misconceptions that men are not good with children or that men are dangerous to have around children.

Elizabeth and Raul are a voluntarily childless couple that invest time in others’ children. They do this, in part, as a way to reinforce kin relationships. Elizabeth is a fourth-generation Mexican American, and Raul is a third-generation Mexican American. They live in Fort Worth, near the Hispanic neighborhood where Raul grew up. Much of Elizabeth’s family now lives in Fort Worth as well. They are close with the family of one of Raul’s childhood friends and help to care for their children. In fact, they consider this group to be part of their family. For Elizabeth, winning over their approval was important in finding acceptance in Raul’s larger family structure:
They have three kids; after they had their first son, we’d go visit and Raul would roughhouse with the little boy and hang out, and this, that and the other. [Their friend said:] “You’re so good with our son, why don’t you…when are you gonna have your own [child] or why don’t you?” and I looked at her, and I said “look, if I had my own kids, I can’t spoil yours.” She thought about it, and she said “hmm, good point. Nevermind. Carry on!” […] and became like an advocate for us, which was good, because she’s a member of my husband’s best friend’s family, who lives in the area and we interact with a lot.

In addition to their roles with this family, Elizabeth describes how she and her husband contribute to their Goddaughter’s college fund, helped a nephew get his first car, and help a niece with tuition and books for college.

Raul also briefly speaks about have close relationships with their friends’ children: “they like us; they love us.” However, he does not make connections between their support of children to larger kinship structures like Elizabeth does. Elizabeth shares:

A lot of people often say to us – especially older folks – well, who’s going to take care of you when you get older if you don’t have kids? And we look at it as: we’re pollinating and increasing our odds in some ways even more so with some of the young people we’ve invested in, if not monetarily, then even from a time and attention standpoint.

As a couple, Elizabeth and Raul create and reinforce kin links with children and families in their circle through time, love, and money. Elizabeth knows the importance of these nurturing relationships for kinning; Raul supports and enjoys these relationships, but does not have as much to say about them as part of family or kin structures.

Women (and some men) across categories point to pets—in particular, dogs—as important objects for nurturing and care. In effect, they created kin links with them, describing them as children. Ana, a forty-seven-year-old, second generation Mexican American whose children are now teenagers feels that her small dogs are her new children. She insisted that I should get a dog; my cats were not an acceptable substitution in her book. She feels that a nurturing role could be best substituted by lap dogs if there are not children in the house. Teresa,
a thirty-three-year-old third generation Mexican American woman, who is a step-mother and whose husband’s children do not live at their house, places importance on their rescue dogs. She says they are deeply important emotional objects for her husband and show him how to care for something. These pet kinship relationships can be a source of struggle between generations; I discuss this further in the upcoming section on pressure from family.

The Household

Ten participants specifically link women—either through the wife or mother role—with the household. To my surprise, only women made this link. Men instead focus on women’s caring roles, similarities between men’s and women’s roles, or women’s role in supporting husbands. It seems that women associating women’s roles with the household are not saying that their primary role is in the home; rather, they are recognizing the reality that they are relied upon heavily in the home. Women are making this link as a reflection of their daily responsibilities and reality. As we will see in the next section, men take fatherhood seriously as a role. However, men still tend to see women as primary caretakers of the house, just not explicitly. Men express seeing their household contributions as equal, while women see their daily roles managing calendars, being default cooks, and so on, acknowledging that in the end, it is still their work, and men show up to help.

Fatherhood

Fatherhood is a role that male participants report as important to their lives. They speak at length about how being a father has transformed their lives and how the value being an active parent. However, fatherhood is not understood as necessary to masculinity in the same way that motherhood is necessary to womanhood. Participants report that men’s primary role is as a provider for the family. This is associated with both the father husband role.
Men as Providers

About half of participants described both husband and father roles as being providers or having a key monetary role in the family (seventeen participants). Both men and women conceptualize this as men’s role in the family. This does not mean that men need to be sole providers, but there is an expectation to bring money into the household; many women say they would not want to financially support their husbands, even if they argue that every other role for a husband or father is gender-neutral. Sofia is a forty-nine-year-old immigrant from Mexico who is voluntarily childless. When I asked her about men’s roles as fathers, she told me that men and women should have the same roles, but she also feels she would not financially support her husband. She tells me that she knows this is hypocritical on her part, but that it is still how she feels. For her, men’s roles are tied up in being a partial or sole breadwinner.

Some participants describe men as providers within larger narratives of fatherhood. For example, Matthew is a fifty-two-year-old, fourth generation Mexican American with two children. When I asked him about the role of a father, he replied:

To provide. To give [children] opportunities to do things I didn’t get to do as a kid. I wanted to be involved in every part of their lives, so I was the helicopter dad. I wanted to be their ball coach, their scout leader: anything [the children] did, I wanted to be in the middle of it all. I knew who their friends were, which was important because who they hang around has a lot to do with who they are as well. I didn’t even intend to be a friend to my children, but over time—especially for my son because of scout activities—I became the friend at times. I got to be a music teacher for them. Now, I also want to be a life coach for them, teach them about finance, decision-making: some of the things you experience in life that nobody ever tells you how to deal with.

In addition to Matthew’s role providing financially for his children, he also speaks about the importance of providing his children with experiences. In doing so, Matthew provides not only monetarily but also in terms of experiences with the goal of being a close and involved father.
In practice, not all men are breadwinners in their families. The exclusive breadwinner in two couples (one parents, one voluntarily childless) is the woman. Emilie and Robert, who we met in the last chapter, are parents of three children and see Emilie’s role as the primary breadwinner as temporary. Robert retired, Emilie had foot surgery, and they have a young infant, so Robert is playing “Mr. Mom” for the time being. They plan to return to a dual-income family within the next year. Elizabeth and Raul are a voluntarily childless couple who were also featured in the previous chapter. Elizabeth has a stable, well-paying job, so they chose for Raul to quit his lower-paying job that he did not like so that he could build his own brand and company in a risky industry that was his passion. However, he has also taken on more household duties as a result. It is also of note that several male participants described taking on parenting roles with younger siblings when they were growing up. Often this was because they had a single mother who was the family’s sole breadwinner. Moreover, parents are more likely to describe men as providers than voluntarily childless couples. In fact, parents are proportionally twice as likely to give this response as childless couples. This could be because, generally speaking, childless couples have fewer financial pressures because they do not need to financially support children. Or it could be an indicator of more equitable gender attitudes among childless couples, a trend found in the literature on Anglo voluntarily childless people (Agrillo and Nelini 2008).

Men as Caregivers

Men in the sample took fathering responsibilities seriously. In fact, three men in my sample had spent periods of time as their children’s primary care taker. Moreover, many voluntarily childless men sincerely worry that children would take a huge amount of care that they do not feel prepared to provide; this signals that they feel they would have sizable
responsibilities to children. For example, Raul, a forty-two-year-old voluntarily childless fourth generation Mexican American said that a father should:

Be there for child—not just feed and house them. Guide them. Make them do things they may not want to do. For example, when I was young, my father made my join Boy Scouts, and it ended up being a good thing. Fathers should discipline their children, but not necessarily physical discipline. Everything I did with my dad, I try to pass on by doing with kids I’m close to.

Raul lists a variety of things that fathers should do, based, in part, on the best parts of what his father did for him. He tries to pass those experiences on to children in his life as he is able but also knows that fatherhood is an important obligation.

Similarly, all of the fathers in my sample describe ways in which they commit time and energy to their children. This is illustrated in Matthew’s narrative above; he went so far as to describe himself as a “helicopter dad,” a play on the term “helicopter mom,” which is someone who is overly-involved in her children’s lives, hovering. Matthew wanted to be involved so much that he worried he crossed a line into overly-involved. However, I argue that women still have a mediating role in fatherhood for men in this sample (see also: Townsend 2010). In other words, men become fathers through women’s roles and their relationship and activities with their children are also often mediated by their wives (for example, when a wife is the keeper of the calendar). The most important way this happens in my study is that women have the final say in reproductive negotiations; men’s ability to become fathers relies on their wives in a way that is not true for ways that women rely on their husbands. As we will see in the next section, men tend to be very flexible in reproductive ideals and timelines and have blind spots when it comes to household gendered roles.
Egalitarian Marriages

The idea of an egalitarian marriage is also associated with a modern identity. Participants usually frame strict adherence to gender roles as dated or old-fashioned, including the mandate that women take full charge of the household. How does this idea appear in discussions in heterosexual marriages? Do participants see their marriages as egalitarian? How does gender-neutral language function in reproductive narratives?

Flattening Gender Differences

Motherhood and fatherhood are specific gendered identities and roles with associated expectations, rewards, and drawbacks. However, it is not necessarily popular to speak of them as such. Participants tend to downplay gendered roles and expectations in spousal and parenting roles between the two before going on to discuss women and mothers as nurturers and husbands and men as providers, as seen in the previous sections. Eighteen participants (eleven women, eight men) argued that men’s and women’s roles are based on individual personalities in spousal roles, parenting roles, or both. In other words, each person does the tasks that she or he enjoys or is better at. This, of course, discounts the possibility that we enjoy the tasks and roles that we practiced as we grew up, thus making them easier and more enjoyable. Instead, this arrangement is framed as an egalitarian and practical way to run a household. It is also discussed as more efficient, a way to make sure the most gets done in the shortest amount of time; it is quicker to get things done if people work within their specialty, an argument that strikes me as a Fordist approach to household labor and care work, but one that participants were more likely to frame as “divide and conquer,” preferring a political or wartime metaphor that emphasizes their role as a team. Elizabeth is a thirty-nine-year-old voluntarily childless woman who feels that spousal roles in her marriage are based on personality. She said:
[My husband and I] just totally pushed the barrier on stereotypes and roles in a marriage because I am the breadwinner now. He is pursuing interests and doing most of the day-to-day household stuff. I still do bills and some other things, but he takes a lot off of my plate. We always approached our marriage from a team perspective; we are partners in life. He was glad to let me take over the bills when we got married, [which is different than] how our parents’ households ran, where the husband takes care of all of that. But [my husband] takes care of insurance stuff, traditional things with cars. From a role standpoint, it’s being a good partner, whatever that looks like for us. […]

I tend to be more the high-strung one, stressed-out. [My husband] is good at bringing me back to reality, bringing things back in perspective. I see that as a testament to his faith, strength and belief; I definitely think he’s got it down better than I do.

Elizabeth feels that since they have moved away from the traditional male breadwinner arrangement, it has freed them up to arrange spousal responsibilities along whatever lines work for them. She is most concerned that they are good partners, “whatever that looks like for us.” She feels they are a balance of personalities and that they can work together as partners to run the household.

Twenty participants (twelve women, eight men) argue that there are not gender-based roles in the household in at least one category (wife/mother/husband/father) or, conversely, that the roles are the same for both. Some argue that since there were not gender-based roles, personality and skill are used to divide up roles; this is where this group overlaps with the previously discussed group. However, others argue that they each step in when needed. Daily life is busy and ever-changing, so, similarly, parents and spouses need to be flexible in what they do so that the day’s household tasks could be accomplished.

In total, twenty-nine out of thirty-five participants (83% of participants) responded in one (or both) of these ways that emphasized gender was not an organizing principle in parenting or marriage. This reflects American trends in recognizing men’s roles in the household and women’s roles in the workforce. However, as I previously alluded to, the assertion of gender-neutrality was often made in tandem with an exception (such as mentioning men as providers).
Moreover, this is a case where what we say doesn’t necessarily match what we mean, much less what we do.

*Support or Partners?*

Participants describe men’s and women’s roles as relational; one more often than not referred to the other. Participants often use metaphors of teamwork or partnership to describe their relationships with their spouses and women’s and men’s roles in the household and family. I see metaphors of teamwork and partnership as more egalitarian than one of support. Teamwork or partnership connotes even footing. However, support implies that there are different roles, but that they are flexible.

Voluntarily childless women are most likely to describe spouses as partners. They see themselves and their husbands as working together on the same team. Elizabeth’s description, above, also illustrates how participants use of metaphors of teamwork or partnership in a marriage. She emphasizes the sharing of responsibilities and the ability to shift responsibilities when life circumstances change. This includes a willingness to take over some of the other person’s tasks when needed. Conversely, parents (both women and men) are most likely to see a wife’s role as supporting the husband. And men who had children are most likely to see a husband’s role as supporting a wife. Robert, a fifty-three-year-old fifth generation Texan of Mexican descent says that the role of a husband is: “Support. […] I consider myself the fixer. A lot of things break around here. My daughter says I always try to make everybody happy. And that could be good or that could be bad.” Robert feels that his role is to support his wife, and he used the metaphor of fixing to describe it. He does mean fixing physical items in the house that malfunction. But he also alludes to his emotional work and practical support meant to keep his wife and children happy.
In short, most participants see their marriages as a give and take between themselves and their spouse, in line with the ideal of companionate marriage. However, voluntarily childless couples used more egalitarian language to describe their relationship, centering on metaphors of partners or teammates. This finding is similar to research with Anglo voluntarily childless couples. Research suggests that voluntarily childless couples have more egalitarian views of gender than parents (Ireland 1993; McAllister and Clarke 1998; Morell 1994). Similarly, Abma and Martinez (2006) found that voluntarily childless women have a more egalitarian view of gender than mothers.

*Blind Spots*

As I have described, men and women often espouse egalitarian or gender-neutral ideals in terms of spousal and parenting arrangements. However, it is likely they are reporting this based on several factors. First, men likely are doing more in the household than their fathers, and certainly their grandfathers, did. This creates a veneer of equality when a gap may still remain. For example, in Williams’ (1990) study of professional-class Mexican Americans, he found that only a very small minority of women in his sample were working toward egalitarian ideals in marriage. This is vastly different than my findings, where most couples speak of the importance of sharing the workload in a marriage, to varying degrees of egalitarianism. Second, as argued in the previous chapter, asserting that the household is not divided by gender helps assert modern identities in opposition to their parents’ “traditional” marriages. A key association with this structure is the idea of the patriarchal (“macho”) father figure and a marriage delineated by gender. Last, men sometimes simply do not see the invisible care work women often do in the household. Or they may still conceptualize their role as helping around the house, implying household duties are their wife’s responsibility. As discussed above, the latter framing is
common among parents, who are most likely to see themselves as supporting each other in their roles.

With couples who say they are partners and split work equally, we still see inequalities arise. Martina and Lucas demonstrate this clearly in a joint interview. Martina and Lucas are voluntarily childless. Martina is a thirty-seven-year-old immigrant from Mexico, and Lucas is thirty-four-year-old immigrant from Argentina.

Jessica: What is the role of a wife?

Martina: I don’t think I have a role as a wife, per se. Because we have had to do everything together, so it’s kind of a teamwork. So, we both work and when we come home, if he is not here, I start dinner, if he is here, we both start dinner. And we just try to make each other happy. So I don’t think I have to fulfill a role of wife. And also with the laundry, we do it together. Everything is both of us because we both work. So he understands that it’s not all my responsibility so in the house, we both do it.

Jessica: Are there any differences between roles of wife and husband?

Martina: Pretty much the same. We just make each other happy.

Jessica: What is the role of a husband?

Lucas: Be honest. Respectful to her and faithful. Those are my three major things. Helper, you see, because she cannot take care of the house by herself.

Martina: That’s one of the things – you’re like “I help” – no, you don’t help because it’s not my responsibility. It’s both of our responsibility.

Lucas: That’s what we decide when we sign the contract to become married – we are both going to help each other. It could be for anything – cooking, take care of the house, or things that we got to – run errands, do whatever. So we share what we need to do during the day. She usually takes care of paying and stuff like that and I sometimes “Hey, don’t forget to pay this too” “oh yah” because she cannot be all over the place, so I’ve got to help her.

Martina: But still we have that “machismo” a little bit whenever you say “do you want me to help you in the kitchen”? No, it’s not my responsibility to cook dinner! It’s like if I came and told him “Hey, do you want me to help you out with dinner?” What’s he gonna say “it’s not my responsibility, right?” So it’s not mine either; it’s both of us, or the three of us. Because even my son is like “oh, can I help you?” “No, just clean – you also live here. You’re not helping me. I’m not the maid.” So I just try to educate them on that.
They think they are helping me, but no, these are not my chores. I work and I believe that if we all live here, we all have to keep it clean and do our part.

Lucas knows that he helps around the house. Throughout interviews, it is clear that he deeply loves and respects his wife and strives to be a good partner to her. However, Martina struggles to explain to Lucas that she feels he is not truly undertaking half of the work in the household. Lucas uses the word “help” to describe his roles in the home, which Martina points out means it is not truly split. This is a blind spot for Lucas; all he sees is that he is pitching in at home. If he is doing this, he thinks, what could the problem be?

It is this kind of structure that undergirds some of the responses of men’s and women’s household roles as gender-neutral or “the same.” In many ways, both men and women may be attending to household work in ways that are radically different than their parents’ marriages. They see these differences and, in combination with their modern identities, interpret their marriage as egalitarian and/or gender-neutral. However, it becomes clear that they do not think of the details of their relationships this way, as gendered themes emerge in their narratives. So it is likely that, in practice, they also are not egalitarian.

Negotiations

Here I return to the idea that gender is negotiated as part of husband/wife and mother/father roles. Roles and ideals are practiced and negotiated as participants are busy “doing” gender and kinship in their lives.59 My data necessarily focuses on how this works in companionate marriages, where participants are using their narratives, in part, to assert themselves as distinct from their “traditional” parents. Below, I follow how this works in choosing a partner for marriage and through extended periods of reproductive uncertainty.

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59 See Chapter 2 for details on this idea.
Choosing a Marriage Partner

When considering reproductive negotiation in heterosexual marriages, I wondered if participants were agreeing upon their envisioned families with partners before marriage, thus minimizing the amount of negotiation required around family formation. In other words, are reproductive goals an important part of choosing a partner? I was surprised to learn that generally, they were not. Voluntarily childless couples, in particular, more often went through reproductive negotiations as couple, rather than marrying someone whose views matched their own. A few voluntarily childless participants told me that if someone they were dating wanted children, then that would be the end of the relationship. But a much more common response was that participants chose their partner based on mercurial factors such as attraction, personality traits, and timing in their lives.

Claudia, who we met in the last chapter, is a sixty-three-year-old voluntarily childless woman who was born in Colombia and immigrated to the United States with her family as a child. When she first started dating her husband, she thought he seemed immature, but as she got to know him, she grew to love his warm personality. From there, she found her relationship “just progressing.” They got engaged because they felt it was time in their relationship, then life progressed quickly from here. When I asked her if she discussed desired family size with her then-fiancé before marriage, she said:

I mean, no, we really didn’t. We didn’t talk about…I think we kind of mentioned it, but it wasn’t like we talked about specifically: “yes, we’re gonna have children, this is when we are going to start it.” It wasn’t specific that I remember it being a conversation. I think it was just kind of a given. And I think that’s why we kind of ended up in the situation that we did [putting off children and decisions about possible infertility interventions] because we really weren’t proactive about it. We just kind of assumed…that it would happen. It’s just part of…I mean, five kids in his family, five kids in my family. We just figured we’d have kids.
Claudia emphasizes in her dating and reproductive history with her husband that she was simply going along as life and their relationship progressed. Her relationship was based on personality traits, romantic love, and timing in her life. Similarly, she and her husband expected they would have children because they had similar backgrounds. However, Claudia blames this attitude for their never having children. Since they never set expectations or had specific discussions about wanting children, it allowed their period of reproductive uncertainty to linger. She does not say that she regrets this progression because it is the result of both her and her husband having full, busy lives. If they had really, truly wanted children, she feels they would have been more aggressive about pursuing infertility diagnoses.

The only group that is likely to choose a partner based on reproductive goals is mothers. Many women in this category see wanting children as a catalyst for marriage. Some meant that they may have dated longer than they did if there were not a biological clock on having children. Others were yearning to be mothers and felt that marriage was the way to that role. Given the well-documented importance of motherhood roles to womanhood, this is not a particularly surprising finding. For many of these women, motherhood became an important part of their identities and a joy in their lives. They were concerned with educational and professional goals, but negotiated those around motherhood, rather than the other way around. Emilie is a forty-four-year-old second generation Mexican American who has three children. When I asked her why she decided to get married, she said:

Since the end result was to be a mom, I looked for people who would be a good parent when I was dating. In some ways, my marriage is really wrapped up in my children. It’s the glue that holds us. That sounds terrible. […] [my husband] knows [that] if I did not want children, I would not have married him. My children are everything to me. Without my kids, there’s nothing. It’s all about the kids.
Emilie sees children as the center of her marriage. She wanted children above everything else, so when she was dating, she was explicitly looking for a man who could father her children. Now that they have three children, they are the most important element of her family, not her relationship with her husband.

**Reproductive Uncertainty**

Many participants experienced prolonged periods of reproductive uncertainty in their marriages. I understand reproductive uncertainty as time where participants are undecided about if or when they should have another child. They may be unsure of what path to take next, or they may be in a period of their life course where adding to their family is not of interest. Generally speaking, reproductive uncertainty is more common than in the past because people are now more likely to delay having a first child; this is true in both the United States and in Latin America. This is linked to the popularity of companionate marriage, as couples feel it is important to experience time together as a married couple before bringing a child into the family. This is in contrast to a model where one needs to prove one can have a child immediately after marriage, as used to be common in much of Latin America (Hirsch 2003). For parents who are committed to family planning as something to be controlled, the ideal of time together as a couple (often a year) is often cited as a way they planned the timing of the first child.

About half of the couples in the project (nine) report extended periods of reproductive uncertainty, either in reference to the decision to have children or when/if to have more children. These periods often spanned years. This does not mean constant discussion over this time period, but often means the question lingers unanswered. Some couples return to the question periodically, and others have long periods where it was simply off the table, often because the woman in the couple is working on educational or professional goals. By contrast, women often
report “always knowing” that they did or did not want children. Many have a concrete event in their lives before marriage that they point to as an origin for this. For some childless women, it was a cautionary tale, seeing the consequences that teen girls faced after becoming pregnant. Or it was the fact that they never wanted to play with baby dolls. For mothers, a common example was their desire to babysit siblings or be around children at a young age. Some men also reported “always knowing,” but much less often than women. However, “always knowing” does not preclude extended periods of uncertainty. In part, this is because participants tend to negotiate family formation after marriage, not before. Moreover, after an accidental pregnancy, participants often wished to have the child.

Consider Patricia’s ongoing reproductive negotiations with her husband:

From the fifth grade, I did not want to be a statistic. And so when I got married at twenty-four, I said, “OK, I love you. We both want to have children. Let’s wait ‘til twenty-seven. Let’s wait ‘til twenty-nine. Thirty.” And we just kept pushing it back – I kept pushing it back. OK, thirty-two. OK, thirty-four. It took me longer, I hate to admit, it took me fourteen years to complete undergraduate because I had to work full time. So it took me a long, long time because I had to work the entire time. So whether I took one class or four classes, every semester it was a struggle. That, to me, was more important. I would see my friends at school, and the ones that had children, they had such a hard time with little ones and school and balancing work and school and children. And I said, “I don’t want that life. I want to focus on my education.” And so, I did. Finally graduated in my late twenties and then went to graduate school in my late twenties, early thirties. […] It was very important to me to continue with school and not have children happen to me, but to have them when I wanted to have them.

I was diagnosed with diabetes when I was thirty-eight. And I’m forty-two now. And for those few years I was diagnosed, I’m having more health issues now. So I’m having to deal, I’m insulin-dependent now. That also, where I’m in a better spot to have children, it’s like health-wise now. So it’s not school anymore. It’s health-wise, at forty-two, do I want to have a high-risk pregnancy? […]

And now that we feel like we’re in a better place, if the possibility happens, we would embrace it. If the possibility had happened at any point in our marriage, we would have embraced it, even though I had [been meticulous about birth control] [laughs]. So we would have embraced it.
So we are content...we just had our anniversary and in each of our cards, we both wrote how content we are with our lives. Now, if we added any pets or any babies, we would still be even more content and happy. But we’re OK. We feel very OK. That’s very different for our culture, to not have children.

Patricia and her husband have spent their marriage working through and revisiting the issue of family formation. Patricia’s professional goals were centered as important for both partners. But other practical concerns, such as health issues, must also be taken into consideration. Also notice that Patricia reminds us that if there had been an accidental pregnancy at any point, their family would have been different. Patricia struggles with the right choice for her.

Her husband is Arturo, a forty-three-year-old third generation Mexican American who spent his youth in Texas near the Mexican border. Arturo has felt ready to have children for years, but having children is not his top priority:

[Patricia] had always made a promise to herself that she didn’t want to have kids until she had achieved certain goals. And I totally understand that and I totally stood by her and I totally supported that, and I told her as much and I still do support her to that end. But as time goes on, you always wonder “what if?” or “do we?” or “is it too late?” or “can we?” or “should we?” So that flame has never been entirely extinguished. Have we made a concerted effort to conceive? No. […] We know too that as we get older, we have to take care of ourselves better and other things. But then we hear people way more advanced than us having their first children or their second children or going “hmm”. All that sum total has kept that possibility. If, however, we choose not to, we know too that we still have a lot to offer those around us. And we have a lot to offer even those we haven’t met yet. Does that mean we would consider adoption? We don’t know, maybe. We have not totally discounted anything; we have not ruled anything out. But for right now, it’s kind of working for what we want to do, not having a child. And I know that there’s a time window and we’re keenly aware of that, and that’ll be something that is going to push us either to act or to say “OK, you know, not, we’re going to look at other, if we get there.” So, that’s where we are.

[…] We have faith with whatever way we’re blessed – either to keep sharing of ourselves with others or to bring a little one into this world, it’s gonna work. And I think that comes from our faith – of there’s a time for everything, there’s a season for everything. And right now, we firmly believe we are where we need to be, doing what we need to be doing, helping those we need to help. And we’re just putting that out there.

[…] I’ve never pressured her—I hope—I’ve never felt like I was pressuring her. Because I think there’s a time for everything.
As is common in men’s reproductive narratives, Arturo has a great deal of flexibility in his plans to create a family. His first familial responsibility is to his wife and supporting her goals. While this stance feels like it is outside of norms of masculinity, it also reflects traditional gender norms. Since motherhood is still tied to womanhood, it follows that women tend to have more defined ideas about their reproductive futures than men do. They have been socialized into the role and have greater stakes tied to it.

**Pressure to Have Children**

Depending on one’s life stage and priorities at the time, reproductive uncertainty can be stressful. Almost all participants report that their parents wanted or expected them to have children. However, it was more common for women to report this expectation as pressure. For some women, this is a source of stress and hurt. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who are childless have more to say on this issue than parents do and are more likely to elaborate on how jokes, questions, or pressure from parents make them feel. Parents who had children when they were young said they likely escaped pressures they would have experienced if they had waited. Others are farther removed from the experience, and so the feelings and memories are duller than they would be for the childless group, who may still be experiencing this pressure, even after reproductive age.

*Minimizing Pressure*

Participants of both sexes tend to distance themselves from reproductive pressures from family. Some report using physical space to lessen pressures (i.e. living in a different area than their parents). Others insist that the prodding does not bother them. Participants assert their individualism: the couple would be the ones responsible for raising the child, after all, not their families. Or I heard a common refrain of “who cares what people think?” Claudia, a sixty-three-
year-old childless woman who immigrated with her family from Colombia, expressed this sentiment:

Here and there [my parents] said they would love a grandchild, but I ultimately felt it was none of their business. Sometimes my mother would say “how beautiful that would be, and I would take care of it, I would help you. I could see them coming to grandma’s house.” But nothing past that, just normal motherly stuff.

Claudia minimizes her family’s pressure for her to reproduce in several ways, including the assertion that her reproduction is none of her family’s business. In this way, participants are able to rely on their middle-class identities and American individualism to partially insulate themselves from family pressure.

In the vein of American individuality, participants commonly discuss potentially invasive or insistent pressure from family members to reproduce and then insist that the events in question are not pressure or that the pressure does not bother them. Take this example from Gloria, a thirty-one-year-old second generation Mexican American, and her husband, Miguel. Gloria and Miguel value their cats as part of their family. This is worrisome to Gloria’s mother, in particular, who lobbies for them to get rid of the cats. Gloria wonders if her mother is gullible because her mother worries about “mythical stuff.” Her mother worries about cats stealing one’s soul and their supposed ability to hinder conception: as reported by Gloria, “Oh, the cousin of so-and-so and so-and-so got a fur ball up her so-and-so, and couldn’t get pregnant.” Gloria printed Spanish-language articles from the Internet that debunk these beliefs for her mother, trying to persuade her that they are not true. However, she also had to tell her mother that she would have children eventually, just not right now, acknowledging the meta-argument embedded in the issue with the cats. This tension over cats seems to be an arena where Gloria is asserting her modern identity against her mother’s “traditional” beliefs, while also obliquely addressing her decision to wait to have children, or possibly not have them at all.
Jessica: Do your parents pressure you to have children?

Gloria: They’ll ask us now like “when are you gonna have kids? We want grandkids” For example, when we go over Christmas, it’s kind of boring honestly, it’s quiet and we eat and it’s over with, versus if you go to a household that has a bunch of grandchildren, it’s so loud and entertaining because everyone is running around. But pressure-pressure? no.

[Miguel’s] mom bought me a bassinet that I have in the attic. She said it was on sale so for whenever we’re ready, we have it. She wrapped it up and made sure that nothing got in it. I wouldn’t call that pressure, but I guess it’s just frugal spending: get it now while it’s on sale for the future [laughs]

Jessica: It didn’t feel like a suggestion?

Gloria: In a playful way. “This is the prettiest thing I’ve ever seen, so I got it for you. So just keep it for when it’s time.” The cats were on it for a while [laughs] they love it.

Gloria softens the questions and gifts from her family meant to speed up her road to motherhood by emphasizing how her parents and mother-in-law are correct in some ways (e.g. a quiet house can be boring). She also uses the cats to punctuate her bassinet story. She was given a carefully packaged bassinet to be preserved until it was ready to be used by a baby. However, she symbolically asserts that she cannot be pressured by showing that the baby item has been opened and is being used by their current dependents, the ones supposedly hindering her becoming a mother: the cats.

Miguel uses a different tactic when explaining how pressure doesn’t affect him:

Jessica: Does your mom talk to you about wanting grandkids?

Miguel: No. Because she was an only parent, she was more concerned that [he and his brothers] treat girls the right way when they started dating. Having kids was never a discussion. Even today, she’ll ask us, “give us some grandchildren” but she knows we’re just doing our thing and making sure we’re ready for that, so she’s supportive of that. So, there’s no pressure in that.

Miguel denies pressure from his mother, but also shares that his mother is very upfront about wanting grandchildren from them. However, he interprets this as couched in assumptions: that
she assumes they will have children when they have reached a state of readiness. And he does not question the assumption that married couples have children, even though Gloria does. In this way, Miguel interprets what I read as pressure from his mother as a supportive act.

A possible reason for the commonality of this response is that participants are doing cultural work to save face, to highlight that they are in control over their choices and their life course. This is also a function of narratives. As people tell their stories, they tend to present their best selves. They draw upon cultural scripts to justify their choices or smooth over wrinkles. Participants may be employing autobiographical power as they shape their concept of self through their narrative (Myers 2015). Or it could be that they did not want to expose a part of their lives that was hurtful. It is also possible that as participants assert their modern identities, they are less concerned with parents’ pressures that are seen as “traditional” and therefore not applicable to their lives, in other words, an unreasonable request.

**Women, Control, and “Veto Power”**

Participants report that women usually have the final say in reproductive negotiations (about 75% of the sample reports this). This is true for both parents and voluntarily childless participants. Participants generally report that there was a goal of consensus in the couple, but that in the case of disagreement, women have the final say. Women commonly give one or more of three reasons why she has the final say.

First, women assert their modern identities, individual agency, and bodily autonomy by saying that since pregnancy would happen in her body, that means it is in her control. Women are firm in this statement, echoing feminist narratives of women’s relationship with their bodies and reproductive choice (e.g. Ross and Solinger 2017; McLeod 2002). Moreover, it

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60 See previous chapter for more discussion on the idea of “ready.”
acknowledges the embodied nature of pregnancy and motherhood. For example, Carmen, a thirty-eight-year-old voluntarily childless woman, moved to the United States to Mexico when she was a teenager. When I asked if her husband and her negotiated reproductive decisions together, she said, “I chose not to have children. I felt responsible and in control of my body, and I controlled that decision.” For her, there was no question over her bodily autonomy.

Women also cite personal educational and career goals as a reason they have “veto power.” Women knew that having children and mothering children was a time commitment and one that would almost inevitably set them back in their professional lives. This is an especially strong assertion for young women who had not completed their education or were early in their careers, as they feared more than a setback, but an inability to start working toward career goals. Educational and professional status is an important part of maintaining belonging in the middle-class, not only financially, but also symbolically. Participants often acknowledge the necessity of both parents working to maintain their middle-class status, so men also tend to be in support of women’s goals in this arena.

Women also discussed lifestyle preferences. A characteristic of the middle-class is fear of losing that status, of downward mobility (Ehrenreich 1989). Similarly, women fear losing the niceties of middle-class lifestyles. Because they largely adhere to the American ideal of intensive mothering, motherhood would be an expensive and time-consuming activity for them. The second implication of lifestyle preference alludes to the time and responsibility associated with raising a child. Women sometimes did not want to give up sleeping in on Saturdays, adding more activities to their already-packed calendar, or to be able to spend time on work. For example, Gloria, a thirty-one-year-old second generation Mexican American, said she and her husband

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61 Almost all participants, regardless of the class status of their family of origin, reported that their parents or grandparents stressed the importance of education in their households.
“have so many plans for us as a couple to travel, our professions, the business, learning from each other [and] about each other, that having a child right now might not be the best move.” She wants to continue to enjoy her lifestyle with her husband, at least for the time being.

High Stakes, Negotiation, and Kinning

Thinking of reproductive negotiation as a critical site of contest and as part of kinning, why is it that women can have this veto power? Women must negotiate familial pressure to reproduce, while attaining educational and professional goals—tasks tied up in pressure to maintain class status. In terms of creating kin links, women are understood as central actors in creating these links and thus have more pressure put on them than their husbands. However, professional and economic attainment are associated with their middle-class identities, which there is internal and external pressure to maintain.

Moreover, gender inequality is reproduced in couples through their adherence to an American ideal of intensive mothering (Hays 1998). Participants understand that having and raising children is more than simply keeping them alive. It is also keeping them in the best schools, ensuring they have well-rounded skill sets and experiences, and optimizing their nutrition, to name a few arenas. And women know that they will be primarily responsible for this. Again, men sincerely discuss the importance of fathers’ roles as caregivers and role models in the family. However, they still rely on their wives to primarily manage children and the household, even when both are working. In this way, the ideal of intensive mothering makes the motherhood role and a woman’s professional role incompatible. It is impossible to live up to such high standards in two places at once.

Stakes for women are generally higher than for men in the realm of family planning. Women emphasize this by invoking discourses of bodily autonomy and, for women with
children, the importance of motherhood to identities of womanhood. Because they have higher stakes, they are more likely to have stronger opinions on reproductive negotiations and timing. These strong opinions mean they have the motivation to draw a firm line in negotiations.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed gendered household roles and kinship roles. It also discussed attitudes about gender egalitarianism in the home. These discussions illustrate that there are many commonalities among middle-class Latinos/as in terms of family, gender ideals, and reproductive negotiation. However, men and women tend to have key characteristics associated with them in the domestic sphere, and there are some differences in how parents and voluntarily childless participants discuss egalitarian gender roles in the home. These gendered roles also inform and shape kin roles.

Participants often discussed household roles as divided based on individual personalities rather than gender. They also discussed men’s and women’s roles as relational and in terms of a companionate marriage. I argue that while both parents and voluntarily childless couples use language of togetherness and sharing to describe their household roles, the difference in patterns of language use signify a difference in attitudes about gender egalitarianism. Parents were most likely to see a wife’s role as supporting her husband; men who had children were most likely to see a husband’s role as supporting a wife. Conversely, voluntarily childless women were the most likely to see their marriage as a partnership, a designation I understand as a stronger statement of egalitarianism that a description of “support.” Of course, statements of egalitarian gender ideals egalitarianism are not a direct reflection of what happens in day-to-day life, as we see when we look more closely at gender roles. Even though many participants started their
discussions of spousal or parenting roles as gender-neutral, they would often proceed to describe roles in gendered ways.

Participants often discussed mothers as nurturers and ten female participants specifically linked women’s roles to the household. Women who did not have children often invest in other children’s lives and articulate these relationships as a way to reinforce kin relationships. Women were more likely than men to report “always knowing” that they did or did not want children. Mothers were the group most likely to choose a spouse based on their reproductive goals. These patterns in the data, where women are associated with the household and motherhood roles, foreshadow the finding that women usually have the final say in reproductive decisions. On the other hand, men’s roles as husband and father were most often associated with being a provider or breadwinner. Men without children spoke of relationships with children, as their wives had, but often with less emphasis and rarely in relation to kinship. These findings make sense with the tendency of men to have less defined ideas about their reproductive timelines. Men and women generally discussed men as active participants in home life and parenting, but couples’ interviews sometimes showed that women felt the work was not truly split, in practice. Several findings were common across all groups. Participants were more likely to work out reproductive negotiations after marriage, rather than before (with the exception of mothers searching for husbands as fathers). It was common for both parents and childless participants to experience prolonged periods of reproductive uncertainty. Moreover, participants tended to minimize pressure to have children that they receive from their family.

These gendered roles and ideals in the household illustrate ways that participants see themselves and their partners as gendered beings. There is some evidence that this functions differently in voluntarily childless couples than in parents. However, there are more similarities
than differences between the two groups. Moreover, this discussion of gendered roles and identities set the stage for an intersectional discussion of how the gendered household roles discussed in this chapter intersect with issues of class and work for women and men. Issues of class and work affect men and women differently; moreover, they are different for parents and voluntarily childless. Women face particular challenges as they navigate intersections of gender, class, and ethnicity. I discuss the choices that women make in response to these tensions and show how kin relations and Latino/a cultural values of family enable some of these choices.
CHAPTER 7:
PERSONHOOD, CLASS, AND ROLE CONFLICT

How do middle-class Latinas negotiate conflicting pressures: motherhood and career? Women employ a variety of strategies to negotiate the two without giving up status accrued in their families by having a motherhood role. I asked participants: has having (or not having) children affected your work life? Patricia, a forty-two-year-old Mexican American voluntarily childless woman, highlighted the conflict she experienced between herself and parents at a job:

It’s actually been very good for my work life, not having children. Because I’m not as tied, I can work late, I can work whenever people need me to which is kind of a loyalty factor. They see that I will be there no matter what; I will make things happen no matter what it takes, whether being there long hours, over the weekend, they know that they can rely on me. To the point that one time I had a job at a pediatric clinic. Everybody there had young children, and they gave us personal time off. They always took it because their kids were sick, so they took their sick time plus their PTO for their kids. Well I didn’t have that, and that was at the time where [my husband] and I were seeing each other every three weeks. So I would use that PTO time, and I would schedule it every three weeks. I accrued quite a bit of time because I was there so much. Then I had four day weekends because of that PTO, and people would get upset. “Patricia is always taking off,” and blah, blah, blah. Well, it was on purpose. It was because I had a accrued it, because I had earned it, because I could schedule it. I felt like, “don’t tell me I can’t take this, just because I don’t have kids to use it on, don’t be jealous or don’t be upset with me.” I even felt that from my manager, that she was very jealous. I was a young girl at the time, and she was very jealous that I could have such a flexible life. Maybe she didn’t feel those flexibilities in her current life or when she was younger, so she didn’t feel I should have those flexibilities. Even to the point, we went to lunch one time, and I didn’t have the guard on, but I had my engagement ring, and she was just so disgusted that it was so much bigger than hers, and I had a hair, and I was talking, and she could not take her eyes off of the ring to the point where she was like, “you shouldn’t even have this because you can’t even take care of it”. I was so shocked. I was so shocked at this...
woman. Because she was so much older than me, yet she felt like I was entitled to the things I was able to enjoy or whatever.

Mia, a mother of two, had her first child while in graduate school, and her children have resulted in professional drawbacks and benefits:

Mia: When [my son] was born, I had just started my PhD, so initially, it didn’t really affect it too much because I could take him with me. Pretty portable: I breastfed him. I took him to class with me and to the field once I started doing interviews. And I think once I started writing was when—and extended family helped a lot. [My mother-in-law] would come once a week and she would watch him and would do our laundry and kind of pick up around the house; she really wanted to be of help. And then I had really good neighbors—sort of extended family really—who would watch him. And then we hired, I think it was a neighbor’s daughter, but she would come and watch him while I worked, so that way I could sort of supervise, but I didn’t have to be in daycare. So we kind of cobbled that together, pretty much until I finished my dissertation, and probably beyond that.

Jessica: What about as they have gotten older?

Mia: As a pre-tenure faculty member, I think they have in that you really need to plan your time. There’s always a certain amount of guilt of sort of being at work and not being with them, especially when they’re littler. And I’m sure I could have been much more productive if I didn’t have kids. But I think they affected my work in positive ways, sometimes. I see colleagues that don’t have kids and their work is their life, and I think that is a really unhealthy thing for some people. Where every rejection of an article or you don’t get a promotion and it affects you so intimately or so personally. For me, I really could separate: there’s work and then there’s life. To me, life is family.

It is clear there are benefits and drawbacks to each approach, whether women have children or not. Both Patricia and Mia experienced work conflicts because of their reproductive choices. As we will see in this chapter, there are also personal conflicts associated with each approach.

This chapter focuses on how women negotiate the role conflict presented in the previous chapter, the pulls between motherhood and career aspirations. They do so in conversation with their cultural heritage and family expectations. To address these tensions, this chapter discusses women’s status vis-a-vis familismo and personhood. It then discusses specific tensions between work and mothering, followed by strategies women use to mitigate these tensions.
Class Mobility

Class mobility is generational change in social class. It is intertwined with a variety of characteristics: family history of immigration, gender, race, ethnicity, and geographic locations (regional or neighborhood). A rare longitudinal study of sources of ethnic and racial disparities in the United States found that Latinos/as have been able to achieve upward income mobility across generations at rates just below that of whites (Chetty et al. 2018). In fact, as a group, Latinos/as are on a path to close most of the gap between their incomes and Anglos’, something decidedly not true across racial and ethnic groups. Some scholars argue that a childhood in a lower class who attains middle class status creates very different cultural assumptions and relationships than those who were raised in the middle class and stay there. Most relevant for this discussion is Vallejo’s (2012) finding that among middle-class Latinos/as, those who were upwardly mobile had different relationships with their families than those who were raised middle class.

Participants were aware of class and class mobility in their life histories. Without prompting, participants almost always described conditions related to class when I asked them to describe their childhoods to me. It is these perceptions of their childhood and descriptions of relationships with their parents and grandparents—which were often contextualized with class and family history—that I draw upon here. I used that data to sort participants into two groups based on their life histories: upwardly mobile and raised as middle class. Some people’s childhoods were in the United States and others were in Latin American countries (and some were in both). However, immigrant status does not necessarily mean a childhood in a lower class, as middle-class Latinos/as also immigrate to the United States for various reasons.
My sample was evenly split between people who were upwardly mobile (15) and those who were raised as middle class (16).\textsuperscript{63} In some ways, difference between the upwardly mobile and those raised middle class are minimal. There were no clear associations between age, gender, or status as parent or voluntarily childless and class mobility.

I found that those who were raised middle-class are twice as likely to have parents in the area than those who are upwardly mobile. A related finding is that 73\% of the participants who were upwardly mobile are first- or second- generation Americans (compared to 56\% of those who were raised middle-class being first- or second-generation Americans). These ratios reflect the high number of first- and second-generation Americans in my sample. It also suggests that the higher rate of middle-class participants who have parents in the area is because their families have likely been in the United States longer. This becomes clearer when we look at the first generation in isolation. Nineteen percent of the participants raised in the middle class were first generation, while 47\% of the upwardly mobile participants were. So, middle-class Latinos/as who immigrate as adults are associated with being upwardly mobile; though there is still a fair amount of diversity in this sample, which reflects the class diversity of Latino/a immigrants to the United States (see also: Zhou 1997).

All but one of the participants who were raised by a single mother was in the upwardly mobile category. This is not necessarily surprising, as there is a correlation between single mothers and poverty. It is an economic disadvantage to only have one employed adult in a household, and women are much more likely to be primary breadwinners of single-parent households than men are. In 2016, almost 41\% of Latina-headed households were poor (National Women’s Law Center 2017).

\textsuperscript{63} I did not have enough information for four participants to categorize them, so they are excluded.
Class mobility was not something that participants typically discussed in any detail or attributed as a cause or reason for their choices or experiences. This may be, in part, because of the middle-class functioning *habitus* rather than as to a conscious identity (Ortner 2003). So participants were often not aware when they were speaking of issues related to class that they were class issues. Participants would speak about class as part of the framework of describing their childhood, usually phrases such as “I grew up poor” or “I never wanted for anything,” but would not use that as a framework or theme in their ensuing narrative. So even though some scholars who work with middle-class Latinos/as find this to be an important variable, it is not central to this project.

**Family and *Familismo***

The importance of family and close family ties in Latin cultures has been written about extensively. This idea can be a difficult one to describe, as there is an ideal of close family relationships in many places and in many cultures. A helpful description comes from Zayas (2011) who writes that “it is not that other cultures do not value the family, but rather, it is the manner in which the significance of the family is expressed and the meanings that family membership encompasses that are distinctly cultural” (22). In other words, the identities, practices, and expressions of family are what are particular in a given cultural context.

*Familismo*, often referred to as a core cultural value, is a concept from psychology used to describe the importance of family to identity for many Latinos/as and the importance of mutual reciprocity between members of the family. It also emphasizes the importance of the family unit, sometimes over individual needs. Ideas of *familismo* and social capital have been used to analyze support systems among Mexican and Central American immigrants to the United States in anthropology for quite some time (Smith-Morris et al. 2013). In other American
contexts, the idea of social capital has been used similarly to discuss the importance of kinship links for survival in poor communities. Notable in this area is Carol Stack’s (2008) ethnography that showed the how use of kinship networks and co-residence enabled members of a poor Black community to survive, but also limited upward mobility.

However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, much writing and theorization of Latino/a class mobility comes from segmented acculturation theory, which assumes that as Latinos/as move into the middle class, they no longer hold onto Latino/a cultural values or practices. Moreover, a study of Mexican Americans with a focus on class differences argues that professional-class Mexican Americans are no longer interacting with extended family members, and therefore, *familismo* was no longer a central part of their culture (Williams 1990). The question then becomes: are participants in this study engaging with the value of *familismo* (or not)?

**Women and Kin Links**

I argue that as women assert their modernity and middle-class identities by combining work and motherhood, they often rely on the “traditional” value of *familismo* and kinship links. Latinas, in particular, nurture kin links and keep them open using technology. I asked participants to name the people they consider to be a part of their family as well as how often they interacted with each person, on average. Women tend to think of their family circle as larger than men do, and women are more likely to place value in keeping up with family than men. Sara and Chase completed their first interview together, and their discussion illustrates this trend. Sara is a forty-five-year-old, third generation American with Mexican heritage. Chase is forty-eight years old and grew up on the Texas-Mexico border. Together, they have one teenage daughter. What follows is our discussion of family size and closeness:

**Jessica:** Who is in your family?
Sara: So, my husband, my daughter…immediate family….and then, my parents.

Jessica: Are your parents immediate family or extended, to you?

Chase: No, she’s still going immediate. You’re going to be there for an hour, you’ll have about three pages [of notes]

Sara: No…. […]And my two sisters and my brother. I just don’t know, because then it would be my mother-in-law. […] I could go all over the place, I don’t know. […] definitely nephews and nieces. Sisters-in-law, brother-in law. That’s probably really family. [Husband’s] siblings and kids, my siblings and kids, my parents, and his mom.

Jessica: This seems like a hard question for you. Why do you think it’s so difficult?

Sara: It is. Because they are all so close. If they were to need anything, in a heartbeat, you would help them, or give them my attention. Or I’m horrible with “I don’t want to hurt so-and-so’s feelings.” We do have a really big family, so […] extended family would probably go to my aunts and uncles and cousins.

Jessica: So when you think about that group of your family, how often do you get to talk to them or see them?

Sara: My siblings and parents, I talk to them a lot. I probably talk to my mom…

Chase: …four times a day?

Sara: …and sisters a lot. But my mom the most.

Jessica: Do you get to see them often?

Sara: Yes, they all live close, so once or twice a week. At least once a week.

Chase: Multiple times a week.

Jessica: Do you talk to your extended family as often?

Sara: More Facebook. Especially with aunts, they might take a picture, and I comment at least once every couple of weeks. Facebook has definitely changed it all. […] I think it is meaningful.

Jessica: I sounds like family relationships are important to you.

Sara: Yes, without a doubt. […] Some people are like “I never, never talk to family,” – to [husband’s] unliking, I’m close to my family.

Jessica: So who is in your family?
**Chase**: Immediate family? Wife and daughter.

**Jessica**: And extended family?

**Chase**: Everybody else that are family: brother, sisters, [wife’s] brothers and sisters, nephews, nieces, mom. I’m not a Facebook-er, so [my wife] actually tells me what my family is up to. I can go weeks or months, years, without talking to or seeing a family member, but if they need something, I’ve got them. My nephew that lives in Burleson new, lived in Pennsylvania, he got divorced, wanted to move to Texas. I had to run it by [my wife], but I said, “come down, move in with us until you find a job.” He’s a teacher, and so, I mean they’re family. But I don’t necessarily feel like I need to be on an ongoing, constant discussion with them. When we do talk, it’s good, but I’ve got so many things going on.

Sara feels close to her family and takes care to contact them and to keep up with their lives. Conversely, Chase is not concerned with the minutia of family members’ lives; he assumes they know he is there for them if and when they need them. Chase teases Sara’s need to be involved in so many people’s lives, when he sees that as unnecessary. Sara conceives of her immediate family as a relatively large circle, while Chase understands it as his family of procreation. This, again, reflects differences in importance of family links for each of them. However, both of them value the importance of being there for family and extended family groups, reflecting the value of *familismo*.

Women often had group texts or WhatsApp<sup>64</sup> threads with closest family members. They also reported that using Facebook kept them close to their families. Some simply meant that by seeing pictures of extended family and knowing that events were happening in their lives that they felt closer to them. Others meant that they had family group pages where they could all share pictures and talk or that they often commented on family members’ posts as a way of communicating. In many ways, my female participants’ use of Facebook recalls di Leonardo’s (1987) classic writing on the “work of kinship” and women’s use of holiday cards as a form of communicating.

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<sup>64</sup> A text messaging system that can be easily used across international borders without incurring extra charges.
work used to main family relationships. As she saw with her younger female participants, my female participants are expected to be fluent in both kin and in professional issues. The professional knowledge is additive; they are still the primary repository of kin knowledge and more conversant in it. I found this to be true for my participants, despite difference in national backgrounds and class to di Leonardo’s working-class Italian-American sample.

Martina and Lucas both feel that Facebook and WhatsApp are important tools for keeping up with family. Martina (37) immigrated to the United States with her family when she was thirteen, and Lucas (34) immigrated from Argentina with his family when he was ten. Martina has a son from a previous relationship, but Martina and Lucas consider themselves to be voluntarily childless. They both have family all over the world.

**Martina:** I didn’t count my family from Mexico [when I asked her about extended family members earlier]. If Facebook counts, I have tons of family. It is very important [to me]. I’ve seen my cousins, when she got pregnant, I saw the picture on Facebook, and now her daughter is three years old. And I do not know her in person, but I know everything about the little girl because of Facebook – her birthday parties and this and that – everything. I feel like I’m part of their life or they’re part of mine.

**Lucas:** Even though we don’t see each other or we don’t talk to each other, but she communicates through Facebook, if there is a big party or wedding or a big birthday party or something, they send us invitation all the time, no? Like, “you guys gotta be here because we’re still family.”

**Martina:** We also have a WhatsApp group with my family, my closest family from Mexico. We have a group, a family group. Every day somebody will post something like “good morning” and everybody will post a picture, which is more private than Facebook, where everybody can see your conversation.

Martina at first doesn’t “count” the use of these applications as ways to stay close to family, but then goes on to describe how she consistently uses them. Since she and Lucas have family all over the world, applications that run on the internet are important for keeping them connected—Lucas uses Skype to speak to family members as well. Even though Lucas legitimizes Martina’s
efforts at family connections using Facebook, she is the intermediary in the interactions: “she
communicates through Facebook.”

It makes sense, then, that women in my sample were more likely than men to consider in-
laws to be part of their inner family circle. Technology allows them to easily feel like they are
a part of family members’ lives, whether they live close or near. They are the ones who are
spending more time keeping up with family members. Again following Di Leonardo (1987),
women are taking up gendered kinship work that keeps them in contact with a larger familial
circle than men. Moreover, mothers-in-law were commonly named as caregivers for young
children, and this caregiving arrangement creates intimacy and reinforces this relationship as one
based in kinship.

Parents in my sample are also more likely than voluntarily childless couples to categorize
family as the one created by themselves and their spouse, often known as the family of
procreation. See, for example, Chase’s discussion of his family earlier in this section. He has no
question about his immediate family; it is his wife, his child, and himself. Of course, the phrase
“family of procreation” is lacking for voluntarily childless couples who conceive of themselves
as a family unit, since they have done no procreating. Voluntarily childless participants often
spoke of themselves and their spouses as a family unit in conversation. However, when asked to
list the people in their family, they typically focused on a family of orientation. It seems, that as
the “family of procreation” suggests, having a child in a couple does cement a family unit in
some ways.

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65 Only one participant invoked the idea of tios politicos as important for her view of family and extended family
lines.
Support and Pressure: A Two-Way Street

Women often rely on mothers and mothers-in-law to assist with childcare. They also do the kin work of keeping in touch with relatives near and far. Both kinds of relatives can provide practical support to mothers, primarily in the form of childcare. Mothers and mothers-in-law can provide day-to-day care and extended kin, such as grandparents or aunts, can provide care during school vacations for older children. Ana grew up in Juarez and later lived in El Paso, cities on either side of the Texas-Mexico border, near the westernmost point of Texas. This area is over 600 miles from Dallas/Fort Worth, an almost ten hour car ride. Ana is forty-seven; she and her husband have two teenage children. She describes ways that her parents contribute to her childcare:

Ana: [my husband and I] moved from [El Paso] to Dallas in ‘95. So I was in my late twenties. […] My parents are still in El Paso. [My husband’s] family is still, well his dad is still there. So he still has a lot of family in El Paso as well. He has a lot of extended family in El Paso.

Jessica: Do you visit?

Ana: We do, usually around the holidays for sure, so we’re there at Christmas time. And then, usually in the summer, from the time [the children] were real little, they have always gone in the summer and spent several weeks there. So the kids always will go, and then we’ll usually try to make a trip out there at some point too, in the summer. They go spend some time with their grandparents, which is good too, because I say it’s their little Spanish camp. And they do come back speaking a little better when they are there for a few weeks. [laughs] ‘Cause that’s all my parents talk, so to my parents, they don’t speak any English at all, which is good.

Ana’s parents are able to provide practical childcare support over summer breaks. But they also provide social support. Ana sees them as a way for her children to connect to their heritage, in part through helping them keep up with their Spanish-language skills. Ana and her husband spoke Spanish to their children when they were little, but as they moved through the school system where they were only speaking English most of the day, their Spanish began to
Ana also discusses the cultural differences in El Paso and Dallas, noting that in El Paso, one hears both English and Spanish spoken in public, but D/FW functions primarily in English.

However, in a system such as *familismo*, there are also costs to receiving support. For example, Irene is a fourth-generation American with Mexican heritage. She and her husband have two children under ten years old. Irene’s family—in particular, her mother-in-law—provide much childcare for their children. This enables Irene to negotiate her mother and professional roles, but this family closeness means that she has an array of family responsibilities beyond childcare. In the last year, she had to take family leave for her grandfather’s death, when her grandmother hurt her hip during a fall, and when her mother-in-law became gravely ill from complications from the flu. Despite the support that Irene gets for childcare, she can still have a high burden in care work, depending on the circumstances in her family network at a given time. *Familismo* also results in more pressure and feedback from family members on one’s choices, the most salient of which for this study are reproductive decisions and one’s willingness to create new kin links by having children. Although parents and mothers-in-law were the most common sources of pressure for participants, extended family members also contributed. Aunts, in particular, seemed likely to (often persistently) comment, joke, or cajole participants at family gatherings about having children, or more children.

**Responding to Pressure to Reproduce**

In the previous chapter, I described how pressure from family to reproduce could create stress during periods of reproductive uncertainty. I also argue that participants may be doing narrative work to demonstrate their independence and modern identities when they say that obvious pressures are not, in fact, pressure. Here, I link responses to pressure with the cultural
value of *familismo*. Participants often justify the pressure they receive from families to have children. They often say that they know their family is coming from a place of love and they do it because they want what is best for them. Adriana, a Mexican American woman who we have met several times, waited fourteen years after marrying to have a child. She describes pressure to have children:

> It was horrible, yah. A lot of pressure. Especially, my side of the family. The culture like that is just what you do. You get married and you have children. Expectation, I suppose. For us, to not do what everyone else in our family has done, and we were a married couple. It was very out of the norm for them.

> It was always toward me. Especially on my side of the family. It got the point where some of my aunts would say – and I don’t think they realized what they were saying at the time and how hurtful and how mean it sounded – but one of them specifically, one of the ones I was really close to would say things like “he’s going to leave you because you’re not going to give him any children.” Things like that.

> Now that I’m a mom, they probably, they just wanted that. They see the happiness that it brings and they wanted that for us. And they wanted to have that. They wanted a nephew or niece to share that kind of love. So I think it was probably coming from a good place, but at the time, it wasn’t for us. The way that it was verbalized was clearly not the right way.

Adriana, along with her husband Joshua, deviated from the life course that her family had hoped she would take. Her family responded in ways that were hurtful to her because she was focusing on her career rather than motherhood. Adriana recognizes these responses as part of her culture and says they did it because they wanted new members of the family who they could love. Her family, and her aunts in particular, drew on expectations in the value of *familismo*, expecting Adriana to contribute to the family kin network.

I argue that the method of rationalizing pressure from family to have children—as we see Adriana practice—stems from the value of *familismo*. Participants such as Adriana explicitly recognize family members’ actions as cultural. By Adriana explicitly labeling it at such, she is consciously demonstrating that she is competent in Latino/a culture. However, this kind of
analysis also suggests that she is a step removed because she has the distance to identify it as
such. Next, instead of continuing an outsider’s view, participants use their narratives to
demonstrate the value of family and extended family. Moreover, this discursive move attempts to
protect their family member(s) from judgments from the outside. In Adriana’s narrative, she puts
herself in her aunts’ place (“now that I’m a mom”) and assigns forgivable motivation for them.
As she puts herself in their place, she also inserts herself in the value of familismo, reifying its
importance. Adriana eventually had a child, creating a new kin link for the family. But
voluntarily childless participants also used this strategy to frame pressure from family.

**Individualism or Familismo?**

Participants take part in practices and values associated with familismo, but are also
involved in larger American systems and values. The result is that they are sometimes utilizing
the point of view of familismo and sometimes from a more Western, individual-based point of
view. Participants tend to be fluent in a variety of cultural contexts and navigate amongst them.
Moreover, culture and cultural values are dynamic (e.g. Lockwood 1993). For middle-class
Latinos/as, social capital and familismo are not values absolutely needed for survival, as they
might be in immigrant communities or even in Stacks’ African American community. So it may
be most valuable for middle-class Latinos/as to adhere to many of the values present in
familismo for practical and emotional reasons, but to temper them with assertions of modern
identities⁶⁶ that are more acceptable in the middle-class contexts (such as work or their
neighborhood) where they spend much of their time.

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⁶⁶ See Chapter 5 for more on modern identities and weaving culturally intelligible narratives.
Personhood, Parenting, and Gender

The idea that marriage and having children are inherently linked activities is present in both American and many Latin American cultures. This idea came up in interviews with both parents and voluntarily childless participants. Moreover, as discussed in the last chapter, participants—despite being a range of ages—had parents and family members who repeatedly brought up their having children. There was a range of intensity of pressure, but it was there. Moreover, literature suggests that since womanhood and motherhood are linked, an important path to adulthood for many women is through becoming a mother. The literature on voluntarily childless women often discusses their experiences of stigma, and some studies have found that women without children are not considered to be mature adults (e.g. Campbell 2003). There are also studies that point to continued importance of motherhood among Latinos/as, in the middle-class (e.g. Martinez and Andreatta 2015) and as a malleable but persisting concept (e.g. Rodriguez 2008). For some Latino/a families, parenthood is the ultimate marker of adulthood, whereas Western culture often marks adulthood in terms of establishing a career or vocation (Zayas 2011).

In this project, personhood is concerned with how people come to have full standing in their family and community. Personhood can be obtained through a variety of channels, but of particular interest in this case is via kinship and the process of kinning. In particular, are female participants relying on motherhood as a means to establish their personhood in family and community contexts? I examine this question with three kinds of information. The first is direct reports from participants about their perceptions of change in status in their family after having children or perceived lack of status in families by voluntarily childless participants. Another is
reports of pressure to reproduce from parents and family. A third is participants’ reports of how their family views childbearing and how they present themselves.

Status

I asked participants if their having children or not having children changed their status in their family. Out of the eight participants who articulated that they felt this was the case, seven of them were women (five voluntarily childless, three mothers). That women experienced shifts in status as part of family formation is not surprising, given the discussion of gender and parenting in the previous chapter. Despite cultural shifts in understandings of gender and parenting in both the United States and Latin America, women’s statuses and identities are still more linked to motherhood than men’s are to fatherhood. This interpretation is reinforced by several men’s responses to this question. They said that their status was unlikely to be changed or harmed by their reproduction since they were the oldest male child. Another possible interpretation of this gender imbalance is that because women are often socialized to be more attuned to kin relationships and do more work managing them, they are more likely to notice when their status changes in the family or when it does not progress as expected.

There were not clear trends in what kind of person recognized a status change, other than gender. The most common age group was thirties to late forties, but the age spread was much wider than that. They were split between those who were raised middle-class and those who were upwardly mobile, and there was not a clear association between those who perceived a status change and how long a participant’s family has been in the United States. One area where participants said this was visible was at family get-togethers. A voluntarily childless woman said her father didn’t want to visit them over the holidays because he only wanted to see grandchildren; he felt there was no reason to visit her without children. Others described their
place in family gatherings: the symbolic movement from a couple sitting with the teenagers to
women sitting with the other adult women was seen as a rite of passage by the mothers in the
group. Michelle, a forty-three-year-old mother of two who moved to the United States with her
family from Mexico at three years old, noticed this after having her children:

Before, I used to… I don’t want to say sit with the kids… but I used to sit with my
husband, and it was us two sitting […] like a couple. It was usually with the couples and
the younger teenagers and stuff. We would sit in groups, but I would sit with the couples.
As soon as I had my child, I would have my baby [with me], and all of a sudden, the
moms were like “Come here!” and they would have me sit with them. And then the guys
would grab Antonio and be like “come on, let’s go drink a beer.” So all of a sudden, he
became the man, the dad, and I became the mom. And then it was like, “OK, this is how
you do diapers and try the formula like this […] and I’m a new parent so I’m, like, taking
notes […]. And I wanted to be in that group because there was so much knowledge and I
was so new.

[…] Our roles changed completely. We became mom and dad. We became part of the
adults – officially the adults. We were officially considered a separate family. Because
before, even when we were married, and living in our own house, when we had
invitations, like when we were invited to weddings, they would give the invitation to my
mom and say ‘it’s for you and your family – so it was my mom, my dad, three siblings,
and our spouses–it was one invitation for all of us. Then after I had my child, then it was,
for my mom, and then here’s an invitation for Michelle. So I became a separate unit.

[…] I was like, I’m part of the adult clique – I’m part of the circle of trust! […] I think
being married put me at the border of, we can hang with the teens, but we can’t really
hang with adults because all they talked about was children, their kids […] And over
here, [with the teens] it was talking about going to the clubs and stuff and we’re in the
middle, going, we’re talking about bills and maybe going to the club, maybe thinking
about kids. So, yeah, it moved us, children moved [our] status. It was like getting that
lapel pin, the senior ring.

Michelle found that the time between her being married and the time she became a mother was a
socially uneasy one. At family gatherings, she was betwixt and between: too many adult worries
to relate to the teenagers, but not able to relate to baby care tips and stories of children’s school
events. She used metaphors of high school accomplishment to describe her becoming a mother.
It allowed her to join a desirable social clique. It was a crowning achievement on adulthood, like
a senior ring for a graduating high school student. In other words, for Michelle, motherhood gave
her a new status in the family. This new status meant that she and her husband were now considered an autonomous family unit, worthy of receiving their own invitation to events. It made her fully socially intelligible and accomplished in the eyes of her family, a full person.

**Pressure to Reproduce**

Pressure to reproduce reflects the importance of this activity in families. This pressure could reflect status for parents, for children, or for both. Most participants identified pressure from family members to have children as coming from a place of love. Having children was an important part of their lives, participants reasoned, so their parents want the same positive and loving experience for them. In general, voluntarily childless participants had more to say about pressures from their family to have children than parents did. Their narratives were longer and had more detail. Due to their position in their families, they were more likely to be continuously dealing with pressures from their families than parents.

**Gender and Pressure**

Women experienced more pressure from older generations to reproduce than their husbands did. Oftentimes, they were the ones who were targeted for pressures from both their families and their in-laws’. This was the case for Elizabeth and Raul, a childless couple who we met in earlier discussions of readiness and of motherhood. They had gendered experiences and points of view on the issue. Elizabeth said:

> There was definitely some interesting pressure sometimes, so after I finished grad school, parents and family would say “OK, so when are you going to have kids now?” I said, “well, I just went to school, I kind of need to go use the degree.” And oftentimes too, the questions would be targeting me and not Raul so we talked a lot about that and how we had to have kind of a team approach, especially—it was kinda “I’ll help handle my family and you’ll help handle your family” discussion.
Elizabeth was affected by pressure from her family and her husband’s family to have children. She felt like she was the target, and Raul was not supporting her. She remembers recruiting her husband in helping to diffuse the pressure she experienced.

Raul recalls pressure from family differently:

Raul: [My father’s and stepmother’s comments] didn’t bother me, but again, it bothered Elizabeth. I think at one point, I would be like “look, don’t talk about it anymore, it’s not gonna happen, let’s move on. You’ve got grandchildren on the other side hopefully coming, be happy there.” I think she probably did the same thing with her parents. So it’s done. I haven’t heard about it from anybody on my father’s side for years, but I heard about it the other night, from their grandchild, who is ten or so now.

Jessica: Who were these comments directed at?

Raul: Occasionally, both, like we’d be at dinner, and they would throw it out there […], it was always playful. And I’d be like “oh, we’re good.” […]

Jessica: So was it directed at one of you more?

Raul: No, but it bugged her more. She was sensitive to it. I don’t know why she was so sensitive to it because to me, it’s my parents, not your parents. If it was your parents, I understand you taking it hard. But these are my goofy parents, so whatever. It’s not like we ever leaned on either of our parents for anything […] so, our decision.

Elizabeth recalls being a target for pressure, and Raul remembers that it wasn’t the pressure that was focused on her, but rather, she had a stronger emotional reaction to it. Elizabeth “recruited” Raul to help her mitigate this pressure, while Raul felt that the issue could easily be dealt with by having a simple discussion with one’s parents.

In reactions to pressure from families, men were much more likely than women to use a reasoning similar to Raul’s than women were. Men often spoke of how they did not feel affected by their family’s desire for them to have children because their families would not be the ones to raise them or to financially support them. They saw those responsibilities as confined to the nuclear family. On the one hand, this is a statement where men are claiming their responsibilities as fathers. They are also reinforcing their association with men as providers. Men are less
involved in routine kinship maintenance than women are, and gendered expectations in their family are less associated with their fatherhood role than their wives’ are with motherhood. So men have more space to prove their modern identity when asked about experiences of family pressure than women do, emphasizing individualism.

There were also almost no reports—from either women or men—of men pressuring their wives to have children. This is likely a sensitive subject, so it is possible that this was underreported. However, given that participants were interviewed separately, and most participants—but especially women—tended to be very forthcoming with details of their lives, I do not think it is likely. Patricia a forty-two-year-old voluntarily childless Mexican American woman told me that her husband, Arturo, had been ready to have children for eight years before she even knew that he was ready. Moreover, when they got married, they both wanted to be parents, so they had been negotiating the issue for eighteen years, and the whole time he was careful to support her educational and professional goals, and not to pressure her for children. However, this does not mean that women did not take the pressure on themselves.

Many women felt the pressure of managing kinship ties and reproductive decisions heavily. As discussed in the previous chapter, women usually had final say in reproductive negotiations. Women were aware of the fact that their husbands were likely to go along with their desires to have or to have children. So they knew they were ultimately managing kinning for themselves and their husbands. I argue that this pressure can be so important for women because it represents not only herself and her husband, but also their status in their families and their parents’ happiness. We met Sara and Chase, a couple with one child, in the last section, where we learned about Sara’s close ties with family. Many couples told me that two or three children would be the perfect number, especially given the expense of children, but it was
also very common for couples to say one child would not be desirable. Originally, Sara and Chase wanted a large family.

**Jessica**: Did you and your wife discuss desired family size before you got married?

**Chase**: Yeah, I think we had those conversations. We live in this house because we thought we were going to have four or five. For other biological reasons, we haven’t, but that’s OK. I’ve always been somebody who plays the hand they’re dealt. Make the most of it and move forward. But we both talked about it. I would joke with her saying—I played a lot of basketball—so we were going to have at least five so we could play three on three. […] [We’re] both from big families, so.

According to Sara:

We always said we would have like three or four [kids], we kind of wanted big. In fact, [when] we moved to this house, [our daughter] was four. And we said, well we’re going to have more kids, so we need a bigger house. But funny how things turn out…less than a month after we moved in [laughs], I had premature ovarian failure—not a good name—basically like premature menopause pretty much: less than 5% chance to have kids. That was really soon after we moved in here. A lot of house, and we don’t really need it all, but it’s been good.

My sister, who lives, like I said […] less than ten minutes away, she had three kids. She has three kids. So every time we have family gatherings or people stay with us, we’ve had nieces, Chase’s niece lived with us a year-and-a-half when she was [attending a nearby university]. His nephew lived here. So family, if they need something, they can stay here. So it always works.

[…] Adoption was just a big…we thought about it, we talked about it…we did. But that was a big decision. […] And then [husband] said, “I’m happy with the three of us; this is great. He took that pressure off. He wasn’t like “oh gosh, we have to have another,” so we just continued, and it’s been great.

[…] And then we just, time keeps going on. And we didn’t ever just say “yes, this is what we have to do.” It was OK. […] So kind of, when he said “don’t worry, we don’t have to, I’m great with us three” it took the pressure off. And then we just kind of didn’t talk about it any more after that.

[…] And my sister, she was going through marital stuff, and I was helping her out a lot. I’m like, gosh, they need our help. I don’t know, that was taking a lot of energy and time and, like, they need us too.

[…] I think [being involved in other children’s lives] did take the pressure off—the friends, my sister’s kid. And then my brother was here at the time, so then I had my three nephews and niece too.
Sara felt that pressure for another child was on her shoulders. Everyone assumed they would have more children, including her. When they were unable to have another child, Sara often got suggestions that she should adopt and struggled with the expectation that she commit to adoption. When Chase assured her that he would be happy with only one child, she felt relief. She knew they both wanted a large family, so was worried that he would be disappointed or unhappy.

Sara also spent part of her narrative justifying her single child. She told me how her daughter has a network of friends and cousins so that she is not lonely. Beyond that, she also spent time justifying her part in supporting extended family, what I understand as explaining how she still exhibits *familismo*. She also talked about taking care of a network of young people. In doing this, she was making sure to demonstrate her ability to nurture and to fulfill the role of a mother. This helped to cement her status as a mother, allowing her to worry less. She experienced pressure from others, but also a related pressure from within to be normal.

**How am I Perceived?**

Another clue to understanding personhood and gender is listening to participants explain cultural norms and how their feelings about them. I didn’t ask any of my participants to explicitly discuss culture or norms, but they often felt that by bringing up these ideas, they could better explain their opinions and their relationship with their families.

One clue is that many voluntarily childless participants did not want to reveal the fact that they did not want to have children to their family and friends. It was not the act of not having children that was the issue, but, rather, telling others about it. As discussed in Chapter 4, I was surprised the extent to which some voluntarily childless participants kept their intent not to have

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69 For more on the related idea of ARTs and expectation, see Chapter 5
children to themselves. Both men and women reported avoiding telling their mothers, in particular. However, men were more likely to report that they felt comfortable telling family members their plans not to have children directly; women rarely did this. Some participants told me that telling people was not worth it, as they felt others would not understand or would be angry with their decision; it would only cause fights, they told me. A few women even told me that to some part of their families, they knew their value was based on their ability to have children. To avoid scrutiny of their decisions, they deflected questions of plans for expanding their family with phrases such as “when we are ready” or “when God gives them to me,” using ideas that their families would understand while sidestepping issues of their intent.

Myra is a fifty-four-year-old immigrant from Mexico; she grew up on the Mexico-United States border. She does not have children and never told her parents that she did not want to. She had a strong opinion on this and was one of the few who said she would not seriously date anyone who wanted children. Her husband has a progressive, chronic illness, so does not want to have children because he would not want to pass on the genes for the illness.

Myra: [My parents] never knew. We never had that conversation, either. I’m not going to bring up that conversation with my parents! I think they just assumed I was gonna have kids. They were gonna wait for me to have kids with my husband, you know. Before that, we never talked about it. I’m sure they were just happy that I never got pregnant. Little did they know…the reason. […] My mom once brought up the topic about, that she, she was kind of sneaky, she asked [my husband]. And I’m sure in my parents’ mind, probably it was because of him that we were not having kids. After all, what good Mexican women wouldn’t want to have kids? So my mom asked him, “why don’t you have kids yet?” and my husband said, “well, we’re not, I’m not, having kids.” I’ll never forget, her eyes just went [wide]. And he said, “look, just so you know, my mom is ill in a wheel chair, her sister is also in a wheel chair. I had an uncle that died of the same illness. It’s in my gene pool. I don’t want to give those genes to a little kid. In good conscience, I cannot do that. And my mom just went, “oh, I understand.” She never said a word to me.

Jessica: If your parents had asked you, would you have told them you didn’t want to have children?
Myra: Oh God, yes. But I figure, my mom thinks I’m so weird as it is, anyway, that I just, you know. There’s no need to torture her. I torture her about a lot of things.

Even though Myra was clear in her mind that she did not want children and reported having felt that way since a child, she still did not want to tell her mother if she could avoid it. And circumstance meant that she could rely on her husband’s health to provide an explanation to her mother. She felt it would cause her mother stress.

Almost half of my participants (seventeen) discussed reproductive norms in their family, labeling them as part of the Hispanic culture (or similar). They often did this in order to show they were different from the norm in some way. This was more likely to be exhibited by voluntarily childless participants than by parents (70% of those who discussed these norms were voluntarily childless). Moreover, women discussed these norms more often than men (70%). However, there did not appear to be a trend along time the family has been in the United States or whether the participant was raised middle-class or is upwardly mobile. It seems this is most common in voluntarily childless participants because they are pointing out how they are different than the norms of Hispanic culture in some way. We see this in Myra’s narrative above. She identified a norm for Mexican women and how her mother assumed she would follow it. She felt abnormal because of her lack of desire to have children and used this framing to set herself apart from it.

Women’s Personhood and the Family

Taking these three components together—status in family, pressure to reproduce from family, and perceptions of themselves—I argue that middle-class Latinas, in particular, obtain full personhood in familial contexts by becoming mothers. Men do not generally face this same pressure, as fatherhood is not expected to be central to their identities. Instead, vocation and providing for their family are key accomplishments for men. However, both women and men
push back against this system. For women, it is emotionally and socially important to gain personhood in the social space of one’s family. For some, this extends to other communities (such as for participants who live in or near the largely Latino/a neighborhoods where they grew up); however, many have extensive social circles where this particular designation of personhood does not apply in the same way (such as the workplace or non-Hispanic-majority neighborhoods). Women may push back using gender-based notions drawn from pop feminism (e.g. Becker 2005). They may argue, for example, that they gain empowerment and independence through being committed to their work. At the same time, they rarely abandon the pursuit of personhood via mothering all together, often working to mitigate the issue by redefining one’s role in the extended family and emphasizing one’s relationships with children. Men have more flexibility in pushing back. Several men said they had status as the first-born son in their family that gave them freedom to make life choices based on individual desires. Generally, though, it seems that since men’s expected role as provider dovetails with middle-class-based expectations of career, they do not feel the same tug-of-war that women do.

Work, Gender, and Family Formation

Issues of class and family intersect in negotiations around parenting and childcare. As we have seen, women are more likely than men to experience tension and role conflict in this space than men are. One way I measured the intersection of mothering and work is by asking participants if their having a child (or not having a child) affected their work life. A key theme that came up in discussions of work and children was flexibility. Parents needed flexibility in the workplace to care for their children. Conversely, those without children spoke of a flexible schedule as a benefit when seeking to advance in their career, especially when working toward a promotion. However, some also reported their place of work taking advantage of their flexibility,
expecting them to travel more or stay late since they did not have children. One even reported her coworkers resenting her ability to use her vacation time for leisure activities rather than childcare responsibilities.

The circumstances of work life that make flexibility on the part of the participant so important, of course, did not materialize on their own. The United States has some of the weakest laws in the world about providing parental leave around birth. Moreover, childcare is an ongoing challenge for most parents, as it tends to be expensive and may be scarce in some areas. Mothers in the United States are subjected to this issue, though the realities of this often differ according to class, race, and geographic area. Middle-class Latinos/as have more options than those with fewer financial resources, to be sure, and, as I described in an earlier section, some have family members to help mitigate childcare issues. However, it is still a significant issue in women’s access to the workplace, especially as they already feel great role conflict between mothering and career.

Parents (both mothers and fathers) told me about the reality that having children affected the kinds of job they could take in order to manage child care. They often used the metaphor of juggling to describe the act of managing responsibilities at home and at work. In short, both men and women reported childcare as something they were concerned with, as (at least partially) their problem. Mothers were generally the ones who took time off of work to care for young infants (in addition to time off for birth). Women discussed the fact that this held them back in their careers in a matter-of-fact way. They saw motherhood and career as a choice with benefits to each. Mothers were quick to say they did not regret any of the time spent with their children, despite career setbacks, and a few said they would have spent more time away from work if they felt it were financially feasible. They saw motherhood as an important part of their identities and
lives. Because of this, another theme in interviews was that women often felt guilty for the amount of time spent away from home and their children. This was especially true when children were young and eased some as children got older. However, several women discussed the importance of work as a way to lead by example for their daughters. Despite the difficulties and heartbreak of their situation, they wanted to show their daughters that they, too, could have professional careers in the future. Along with the pull of guilt came a feeling of distraction at work. Women often felt that their home responsibilities and children were still on their minds as they went through their work day, making it more difficult to concentrate on the task at hand.

Ana, who we met in the section on familismo, is a forty-seven-year-old Mexican American with two teenagers. She says:

[Women are] the ones that are home with the kids, we’re the ones that really raise the family, and I’ve always kind of straddled the fence of being home and working and ultimately I guess you can always find reasons to feel guilty about well, maybe I should have been home or maybe I should have done this or maybe I should have done that. You have to kind of look at, your children can be happy either way. They could be happy with you being home, or they could be really miserable with you being home. They could be happy with you working or they could be really miserable with you working, and it just really depends on the environment you provide for them. Because if you’re not happy with what you’re doing, then that’s really the key, then your kids aren’t going to be happy. So I’ve always tried to put that into perspective. I need to be happy with what I’m doing whether I’m working or I’m home because that’s what the kids see. Childcare is really important, so you want to make sure they’re in a quality environment where they’re well taken-care of, and the rest of it kind of works out OK. Especially my daughter, is a very strong-willed, very independent young lady. And I know some of it is because she grew up with a mom that did work, she saw me have a career. So that’s part of the things she learned too, so it’s not a bad thing to do that. I could have stayed home. My husband would have been fine with it, had I said I really want to stay home. He would have said OK and we make it work. And we would have stayed in that first little house that we bought, which would have been paid for a long time ago, and we wouldn’t have a mortgage, and I could be home…but it wasn’t what I wanted. So I do consider myself lucky that I have had the ability to make the choices for my life, because I know there’s a lot of women that don’t have that. A lot of women that don’t have the choice but to work. Or women who are in a marriage where they have a husband that is not supportive and wouldn’t support them if they wanted to work. So I think they are both equally bad. So I think just having the ability to make that choice about what’s the right
thing for you and your kids are OK with whatever it is, as long as you’re good with it. That’s kind of the way it’s worked out.

But yes, you do give up stuff in your career. But I’ve never regretted it. The time I took off with the kids, I never have regretted one bit, taking time off with them. I don’t. And I […] worked for women that were in positions of a lot of responsibility that were at the vice president level and had husbands that stayed home and raised their kids. Because that’s the only way that works when you’re in that kind of position. And that’s never something I wanted for me. I never wanted to be in that position where I would have not been the one that was there to take care of them. Although my husband probably would have been OK with it [laughs]. “Yah, I’ll stay home, if you wanna do that,” he probably would have been OK with that. But that was not what I wanted.

Ana discusses her desire to be a mother. She frames children’s happiness as a mercurial thing that cannot be predicted, so reasons that the best thing to do was what made her happy. This understanding seems to be a way to assuage the feelings of guilt she could experience for being away from her children while at work. Ana is aware that her middle-class status offered her more options than other women do, but also discusses the difficulty managing childcare and career. However, in the end, she affirms that a motherhood role was important to her and argues that her daughter is a stronger person now because of it. Ana brings up challenges of being a working mother, but instead of dwelling on them, she shifts to positives.

Fathers often reported making tangible work changes to adapt to having children, however, did not report the same issues of guilt and distraction that mothers did. This took several forms. Several fathers talked about the importance of their workplaces being near home or daycare so that they were available for their children. Robert reported working from home to care for children. Chase changed jobs after their child was born so he would no longer have to travel for work. Another participant worked two full-time jobs to allow his wife to stay at home with the children; he says doing this for four years “destroyed his health.” There was a split in responses from fathers about whether having children affected their careers. Some said that they chose to slow down at work after their children were born, not staying extra hours and missing
time when their children were sick, for example. Notably, this was mostly framed as a choice, as something that they had the decision to do or not. Others reported that having children did not detract from their ability to move up at work. Differences in Sara’s and Chase’s narratives illustrate some of these gendered differences; we saw them in the last section. Sara said of her career as a speech language pathologist:

**Sara**: Thinking about [my daughter] being at daycare, so you can’t really be 100% focused on work because you’re really thinking about her. When she’s sick…so yeah, juggling it all definitely makes a difference. When she was a baby, and then you start school-age, kindergarten, you have little shows and parades, so you have to take off work if you want to be there. So it really depends what kind of job you had.

[…] After maternity leave, I went down to 32 hours and she stayed at a daycare where [husband] worked. But yeah, I always felt guilty. I did. “Gosh, should have stayed home.” It was hard and it goes by really fast. When she started kindergarten was when I said I wanted to do something different. […] So I said, I think I’m going to do […] a home health agency, so I thought it would be more flexible. So she was at half-day kindergarten, so I’d go see kids in the morning […] and then go pick her up, but a lot of times it was just barely in the nick of time. […] and I’d still have paperwork at home to do. And trying to find quality time where you aren’t thinking about work so much, just enjoyment time […] probably could have done more of that. […] [that job] was part-time, but when I wasn’t seeing kids, I was doing paperwork here, so it was almost like a [full-time job].

[…] Then, when she was in second grade, I worked for [a local school district], which was probably the best thing I could have done because then I had summers off, and that’s where I am right now. And it’s been nice to be able to pick [daughter] up from school. […] that work schedule [is great] when you have kids, for sure.

**Jessica**: Are there other ways having a child affected your work life?

**Sara**: […] Little things, where she needed something or forgot something at school. I can’t do it, because I’m at work. […] [While at home recovering from a surgery], when I was at home, she made different comments like “Oh, I like you being at home when I go off to school.” […] It just said a lot to me, that comment.

Sara organized her career around her child. She chose jobs specifically so that she could take care their daughter. Even so, there were sentimental things she felt she missed out on by working. Chase’s perspective is slightly different:
Jessica: Did having a child affect your work life?

Chase: The amount of time you spend at work, you think about the responsibility you have here, especially when she was little. I worked for the city for almost nine years and I went to work [elsewhere] and in my job, I was traveling a lot, a lot more than they told me I was going to be doing, and then when the city wanted me to go back to work for the city, part of the decision was the fact that I was missing out on a whole bunch of stuff with her: kindergarten, first grade, second grade ‘cause I was gone 4-5 days a week, 3 weeks out of the month. So I’d leave on Monday morning and get back Thursday or Friday from different cities.

I work a lot either way, probably a lot more than other folks that have kids, but it’s kind of the nature of my job. But next week, [daughter] is getting inducted into National Honors Society and there is a [public meeting his is responsible for] so, he has already told [his team at work] that he is not going because he is going to the event for [his daughter]. […] I think it is important to impart on [your children] what is important; they’ll follow it, parents set the tone.

[…] I think family in general impacts your work life…and vice versa. Trying to keep that balance is important.

Chase also felt he missed out on moments in his daughter’s life since he was traveling so much. He did change jobs so that he could spend more time with his family. However, there is a difference in tone in his narrative and Sara’s. Sara formed her career choices around her mothering role; Chase felt his fathering role was one of many reasons to change his job. So, while Chase clearly loves his daughter and family and is committed to caring for them, he does not experience the same kind of tensions that Sara does balancing work and parenting. This is similar to findings in a variety of populations. For example, it recalls Townsend’s (2010) finding that for American fathers, the most important way they contribute to their children is providing for them. However, men also told Townsend that they had a variety of nonmaterial goals as parents, such as emotional closeness to their children. This echoes Chase’s narrative, as he works toward providing for his family, a central component of masculinity and fatherhood, while also achieving nonmaterial parenting goals: for example, being present at important events for his daughter.
Research that shows that women tend to have losses in their professional lives when they become parents, while men tend to benefit. Participants’ responses affirmed this finding in the literature. Women in my study were cognizant of the professional setbacks that birth and childrearing can incur for them. Men’s reports were less clear. Men sometimes perceived that commitment to family slowed their ability to earn promotions at work, but rarely felt it set them back. Others did not perceive much of a shift. Participant narratives also reinforce the ideal of intensive mothering; there was a struggle in role conflict for mothers in a way that there was not for fathers.

Solutions

Class, gender, and culture converge to reinforce role conflict for heterosexualLatinas in my study. In Chapter 5, I showed the rhetorical strategy of combining rational, controllable ideas of family planning with those that leave room for the unknown as a way to create a culturally intelligible narrative of their reproductive histories. However, there are also more practical components to that response. Women, and to an extent, their partners, manage these conflicting pressures in one of three ways: opt out of motherhood (voluntarily childless), delay motherhood, or rely on the cultural value of familismo and kin networks to mitigate women’s conflicting roles.

Voluntary Childlessness

One way that women are able to deal with the role conflict they experience is by choosing between the two roles. In my sample, this was accomplished by not having children. There is also the possibility of women choosing motherhood and leaving the workforce permanently, but since I sampled from professional networking groups, this group is not represented. Voluntarily childless women, like most women in the sample, recognized that

\[70\] See Chapter 2 for more on this.
motherhood had very real costs for their career. So one way to resolve the role conflict is to opt out of motherhood. There has been discussion in the literature of an either/or framework for career and motherhood among voluntarily childless women since the mid-1970s (Faux 1984). However, that is not the only reason given for not wanting children. Some preferred a lifestyle without the schedule and rigor of childrearing; they said they wanted to sleep in on Saturdays and to be able to travel. Another framing was that it was a part of one’s personality: they were never good with children, they would not enjoy them, etc. And, as discussed in Chapter 5, women also left room for chance, fate, and God to intervene. To be clear, I am not asserting that women always frame their family formation preference as solely one based on career aspirations. Career is part of the puzzle, but not the whole picture.

The question then becomes, if there are professional rewards for not having children, are there also consequences? In some ways, this flips a classic framing in the anthropology of reproduction—”who may reproduce?”—on its head. My research suggests that middle-class Latinas still obtain personhood through the motherhood role. This is likely not an issue in professional lives, with their families. However, they may have disagreements with family members, experience stress and pressure, and do cultural work to demonstrate their ability to be nurturing women.

When I look at responses to questions about why voluntarily childless participants do not want children and how they negotiated with their partners, there were a wide range of responses (See Table 1 below). Several responses have to do with issues of work, money and lifestyle. Both men and women worried about a change of lifestyle, with ability to travel as a common example, if they had children. Women worried about their ability to find work/life balance if they had children. A related concern for women was feeling that the responsibilities of mothering
were vast and overwhelming. Elizabeth, a third-generation voluntarily childless Mexican American woman who we have heard from several times, describes what a mother should be:

A mother needs unconditional love and patience, willingness and sacrifice, putting yourself second to your kids. Trying to figure out how to do all that without losing yourself. I’ve read about that with other women, especially professionals, trying to find that balance where they don’t then feel guilty about their desire for adult human interaction [laughs] There’s no perfect. Just try to match up the qualities that work best for you and the child. Show love and do the best you can for your child.

Elizabeth feels that a mother needs to put herself on the backburner to devote herself to one’s children. She also acknowledges that there is no perfect way to do this. But she sees it as a role that someone can lose themselves in.

Conversely, men’s most common reason for not wanting children—besides lifestyle—is the environment and culture they would raise their children in. This could be about American culture or about the culture of Dallas specifically. This supports my earlier assertions that the ideal of intensive mothering is valued in my sample. It was common for women to either explicitly say they worried about children and/or pregnancy impeding their work or that they felt the high expectations for mothering were too much for them to handle, key concepts in the ideal of intensive mothering. However, the table also makes clear that other considerations, such as health or personality are taken into consideration as well. Women tend to have personal reasons that they do not want children, while men think more big-picture and think of issues such as money or lifestyle. Miguel is a thirty-one-year-old without children who immigrated from Mexico with his family as a child. When he thinks about the possibility of having children, he says:

I don’t want to have a family in Dallas. I want to be able, in the summer, to take the kids out to the park and to be outdoors and to ride bicycles and to go play soccer. And in Dallas, they’re gonna die of sunburning. If they fall in the street, they’re going to be cooked. They’re going to be inside kids. I don’t want that. […] “I feel also the mental atmosphere, the political atmosphere [are problems]. They’re kids, but politics determine
what books they’re gonna learn in school. And in Texas, that is going terrible. It’s crazy. It’s like yeah, let’s teach kids this totally insane thing and evolution? Nah, let’s take it off the book. I don’t want that at all. Whatever they decide they’re gonna believe in, at least have the facts. […]

**Jessica:** What if that plan doesn’t line up?

**Miguel:** [laughs] I would just pack up and move, open a taco place in Portland. Leaving Dallas to have children is a non-negotiable. If [his wife] got pregnant, I would just find any job in Portland. My mom and brother are also ready to leave Dallas, so we will probably be able to have them nearby. [His wife’s] family won’t [want to move], so it might be tougher for her, but she gets along well with his mom. She can make friends easier [than me] too. If she says “baby’s coming,” I would get into action and get a job.

Miguel and his wife, Gloria, are still in early stages of negotiating if they will have children.

When Miguel thinks of having children, his primary lens is socio-political. He values education greatly, a value he inherited from his mother, and feels that the kinds of things children are exposed to are of utmost importance.
Table 2: Reasons to Not Want Children*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children huge responsibility</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about work/life balance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health complications</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not want to experience pregnancy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mothering instinct</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No family for support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage most important</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not planners</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already cared for siblings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about environment/culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants could give more than one response.

So then, there is a tendency among my sample of voluntarily childless Latinas to understand mothering and career development as at odds. As previously discussed, mothers were also realistic about the career limitations that mothering could create. However, a way to deal with this conflict was to not have children (voluntarily childless). For some, this decision was made early; for others, it was a continual negotiation. Of course, in the future, accidental pregnancies, a change in identity or desire to have children, the need to assume guardianship over godchildren, or a change in approach after women established their careers could mean that these women could become mothers at another time, even for those past their reproductive years.
Negotiating Mothering

Women who become mothers use several strategies to try to mitigate role conflict between motherhood and career. These approaches may work best with advanced planning, but do not necessarily require it. That is, they may generally still be employed by those who have unexpected pregnancies. Women may delay motherhood or delay career. However, this category of negotiating mothering is the least common in my sample.

Delaying Motherhood

A strategy that women may take in order to reduce role conflict is to delay motherhood until they have established their careers. This is not a common approach; only one couple in my sample took it, Adriana and Josh. Adriana, who we have met several times, got married to her husband Josh when she was nineteen and he was twenty-five. For the first fourteen years of their marriage, Adriana did not want to have children. Adriana has worked at a bank for six years and been a branch manager there for three years. At the time of that promotion, her goal was to become the district manager. Since having her child, she still feels she is career-oriented, since she went back to work and is committed to her role there. However, she feels that even though she waited to be established in her career, she still has to put a pause on her career aspirations while she has a small child.

Josh found that becoming a father meant he could no longer work overtime because he needed that time for family; instead, he now only does his job requirements, not over-and-above like he used to. He says his boss and most of his coworkers are parents, so it is a family-friendly workplace where coworkers cover for each other so they can care for their children. Both Adriana and Joshua say they have family-friendly workplaces, but Adriana, in particular, still experiences a lot of guilt associated with long hours at her job. They are both overjoyed to be
parents, but it has required a lifestyle change. And now Adriana is reevaluating her career goals in light of her motherhood role.

*Delaying Career*

Another tactic women used was to delay their career until after their children were older to reduce role conflict. The idea is that it is easier to progress in one’s career after one’s children are older. Two older women (52 and 62) in my sample spoke of taking opportunities to further their careers after their children were older. Since both women who used this strategy are toward the older end of my sample, it is possible that this approach was part of cultural ideas about gender and family when they were younger. However, it may also be that this strategy is best seen in hind sight.

Pilar and Matthew only went on two dates before getting engaged. Pilar was living in San Antonio, and Matthew was living in College Station. They met through Matthew’s mother, hit it off, and pursued the relationship. They were engaged for a year and a half, all spent long-distance, then married. After being married for two years, they had children by surprise—quicker than they had intended—eleven apart from each other. Pilar says the children were not planned but were “planned by God.” Pilar felt that family came first when her children were little. She took time off of work—a year past the birth of her second daughter—when her children were young. She would have liked to stay home until the children were in kindergarten but had to go back to work sooner for financial reasons. After that, she rotated with her husband to care for them. She says that she had a slower job progression because of her motherhood role.

Pilar is careful to note that Matthew is different than men of older generations because he wanted to be a hands-on dad. She notes that he expresses emotions, which is different than how her father was, and that he took care to balance work and parenting, as she did. They did not
have family available to them to help babysit, and Matthew also reported that his children were a priority. After they had children, things changed significantly for him at work; he cut down hours and did not stay late anymore. In fact, he was the only man in my sample who said children slowed down his progress at work. Since his job was more flexible than Pilar’s, he took care of the children in the middle of the day.

Even so, during a discussion of Matthew’s role as a father, we see a difference in understanding tensions between career and motherhood:

Matthew: I think I was a little bit of a coach early on in her career. Because I don’t know that she had aspirations of going into leadership-type positions, and I always saw the potential in her, based on her leadership capabilities, and I really encouraged her, “If you want to be a principle, work towards it. Because I see it, that you can do it.” And she used to give me feedback that she didn’t think originally that she would be best suited for that, or wasn’t sure that she wanted to do it, and I sort of encouraged her to. She would say “I can’t do it unless you give me your support

Pilar: Yeah, because we have kids. I couldn’t take care of the house, I couldn’t take care of the kids if I didn’t have that support.

Matthew: I also think, you know, if something needed to be lifted or moved, I did a lot of furniture moving and rearranging, based on where she wanted it. I had no opinion about whether the bed should be here or there.

Pilar: He still doesn’t.

Matthew: Wherever she wanted it moved, I moved it, because I’ve got the muscle.

By all accounts, Matthew was and is a dedicated father. Matthew and Pilar both describe their marriage as a team where they worked together. But, their assumptions about how career aspirations and parenthood interact are different. Pilar knew that her ability to have time to move from being a teacher into administration would require Matthew’s support. However, Matthew is having a different discussion, one where he feels he is demonstrating how he supported Pilar’s goals and her vision for the home. Matthew does not have anything to say about her tension between mothering and career.
The two women in this section waited until their children were older to advance in their careers. They did not have time or resources to divide between a young child (or children) and the time and effort required to advance at work. Men did not necessarily understand the subtleties of this; since they were pitching in to help with the children, they felt that they were splitting work evenly. This theme has emerged before in discussions of housework. Men are doing more care work than their fathers and grandfathers would have done, so it feels equal. However, evidence suggests that women are still a mediating factor in fatherhood in these examples.

**Leaning on Family Support**

One way that the motherhood and career roles can be negotiated is by leaning on family support. A number of mothers told me how important it was that their mother or mother-in-law was available for childcare when their children were young. It is also common in the United States for children to live with their grandparents—almost one in ten did in 2011—though it is most common for grandparents to serve as primary caregivers for children who live below the poverty line (Livingston 2013). Many women saw family support as an invaluable resource. They knew that their children were in good hands, helping to mitigate the guilt and distraction that mothers reported while at work. They felt this was higher-quality childcare than would be found at a day care and often said they did not know how they would have managed going back to work and handing their young child over to a stranger for care.

When I separate my data by couples who have (or had) family members available for help with childcare versus those who do not, a disparity in reported professional goals appears between mothers and voluntarily childless women. Of the women who do not (or did not) have family to rely on for childcare, most were voluntarily childless (seven voluntarily childless, two
mothers). And almost all of the voluntarily childless women were entrepreneurs (or working toward that goal) or working toward higher leadership positions. The two mothers in this category were looking to make changes in the jobs they already had. The importance of family support also holds when I look at trends among voluntarily childless women and mothers. Sixty percent of voluntarily childless women have no local family who would be available to help them watch their children. Conversely, only 36% of mothers do not have access to this kind of support.

Irene and Alberto are an example of how having available family support makes a difference in her ability to juggle career and home responsibilities. Irene and Alberto have two young children: a ten-year-old and a five-year old. Irene is in coursework for an Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and, at the time of our interview, had just gotten hired as a part-time instructional specialist by a textbook company. She is also in a public policy job-shadowing program so that she can work toward her goal of becoming Secretary of Education one day. Irene is thankful that she has a husband who supports her educational goals, “He lets me go to school, what husband does that? Full time.” Irene’s youngest child just entered kindergarten, so she said that has been a help in terms of childcare. But her in-laws are also available to her for childcare, saying, “I know I never have an issue when it comes to that area.” Some of her family and her in-laws all live locally, and she has close relationships with them.

However, Alberto is the primary breadwinner in the family, so when someone needs to miss work or class to take care of the children, it is usually Irene. Moreover, Irene also helps care for other family members, including her grandmother, who helped raise her. Since she is so close to her family, she also feels obligated to be there for them, as they are there for her. She says, “If it’s not my kids, it’s my family. Because we’re so close to my family, […] you have to do what
you have to do.” Before Alberto got his current job as a machinist, which he considers his career, largely based on its high pay, he worked at jobs that were not as important to him. When he was working less important jobs, he was also the primary caretaker for their first child. He said this time was easy, since he did not have to work; and it was a good experience, since nurturing came naturally to him. So he sees childcare as an easy job: “now I can say, taking care of kids is nothing at all. So women who [complain], all I hear is excuses. Because I was a dad and I did it. Easiest thing in the world. I friggin’ sat at home and I could watch my soap operas, like it’s portrayed in TV; yah, it’s like that.” During this time, Irene says they discussed him becoming a stay-at-home-dad and her becoming the family’s main breadwinner, since she had more education than him (a college degree), but since he was able to get such a high-paying job, that did not end up being their arrangement.

Husbands are generally supportive of their wives’ educational and professional goals. They also want to be hands-on fathers and contribute to childcare. However, there are still significant childcare gaps, which couples filled by support from family. Thinking of Irene and Alberto, Alberto happily contributed to childcare when he was not committed to his career, but when he got a high-paying job, he focused on that and was unable to provide much child care support. Instead, he took on the role of breadwinner. In this arrangement, much of the family’s care work falls to Irene, even though she is a graduate student who also works. In the past she worked full-time, and she is preparing to work part-time, but no matter what her commitments look like outside of the home, she is responsible for taking time off for her children or family. Family closes these gaps. Even though she also has care obligations in her larger family, the childcare they provide makes it possible for her to commit to career aspirations.
Conclusion: Gender, Family, and Family Solutions

Middle-class Latinas find value in *familismo* and work to maintain status and achieve personhood in their family. If they do not have children (or “enough” children), they engage in activities to illustrate their ability to nurture, hoping to relieve some of the familial pressure on them to reproduce. Middle-class Latino men felt that fathers were important participants in their children’s lives. They often had experience caring for children, worked with children, or respected the huge responsibility of parenting roles. However, they do not experience the same kind of role conflict that women do. Their personhood in the extended family is not necessarily linked to reproduction, but rather to be a provider. This dovetails with their middle-class status and its emphasis on professional accomplishment. So women were the ones who needed to negotiate tensions between wanting personhood in their family and career success that matches their middle-class identities and incomes. Participants utilized one of three approaches in this negotiation: forgoing motherhood, delaying motherhood or career, or leaning on family support to mitigate role conflict.

Participants often combine elements of *familismo* with American, individualistic points of view. They often navigate various cultural contexts and combine their identities as modern with the cultural value of *familismo* in their perspectives on family roles and family formation, an act which can require significant negotiation. Women were more likely to gain personhood in familial context through becoming a parent than men were. Moreover, women were more likely than men to be on the receiving end of pressure to have children from older generations: one way they received cultural messages about links between their status and motherhood. Women were much more likely than men to perceive a shift in standing in the larger family structure after becoming a parent than men were. While women did not report pressure from their husbands to
have children, women sometimes put pressure on themselves, as they knew they were making
the decision for both of them, in effect, since women generally had “veto power” in reproductive
negotiations.

Latinas faced roles in their families and their class-based expectations that were
mismatched in many ways. They want to obtain personhood in their families and contribute to
the larger family group. They also want to have careers. However, their belief in the American
ideal of intensive mothering intensifies the disconnect between their motherhood and career.
Men’s roles are not enough to mitigate this. They are committed to being good partners and
responsible fathers; however, their primary role in the home is still as breadwinner, which aligns
with middle-class goals and strategies to prevent “falling” to the lower class.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Issues of reproduction and family formation, while important to both men and women, still primarily fall on the shoulders of women in most American contexts. For middle-class Latinas, the role of mother and the commitments responsible for professional success are in conflict; this is not a new observation. However, for Latinas, personhood in the eyes of families and often in neighborhoods and communities rest on motherhood, adding to role conflict and stress. I found that middle-class Latinas use one of three strategies to deal with the role conflict they experience: forgoing motherhood, delaying motherhood or career, or leaning on family support to mitigate role conflict. Those who forgo motherhood (voluntarily childless) do cultural work in their families and communities to demonstrate their ability to be nurturing, a characteristic associated with femininity for my participants. Those who are mothers most often use the cultural value of *familismo* to negotiate conflicting pressures from their families to reproduce and middle-class expectations to maintain a career, for fear of falling out of the middle-class. That is, an intersectional analysis shows that gender, class, and ethnicity constrain women’s ability to make reproductive choices freely. Women move within this space by drawing upon a cultural value, *familismo*, that literature on middle-class Latinos/as often argue is absent or not important for this group.

Latinos/as’ decisions to have no or few children can also be read as symbolic, in the context of the “Latino threat” discourse in the United States (Chavez 2013). In an American political and cultural context where Latinos/as are conflated with lower-class (Ortner 1998) and
Latina bodies and identities are used as emblems of that discourse (Chavez 2013), middle-class Latinos/as’ small families are more than just an economic decision to maintain middle-class resources. Arguably, our notions of Americanness are inseparable from our understanding of the American middle-class (Ortner 2006). So smaller family size is also a symbolic move, a way to assert one’s modern identity and to differentiate themselves from the negative American cultural discourse about Latina reproduction.

Narratives and the Life Course

Participants in this project generously shared stories of their lives with me. I collected just over seventy-five hours of interview data, people’s stories of their lives and opinions on family. These interviews included an approach that Forsey (2010) calls the “ethnographic imaginary,” an approach that employs interviews to inform cultural context in ethnography. It is the close reading of these interviews—both on their own and in combination with their spouse’s narratives—that is a significant source of data for this project. This close, qualitative approach allows me to speak to participants’ narratives in some detail. In data analysis, I identified patterns in narratives along a variety of characteristics (gender, parent/voluntarily childless, etc.) to understand how my sample of heterosexual middle-class Latinos/as understood their familial and reproductive lives.

This approach lends itself to a discussion of reproduction as part of the life course. In other words, it focuses on the ways that reproduction is part of people’s lives and emphasizes changes and continuities. This is in contrast to a more common approach in social science that focuses on a single reproductive event (e.g. birth). My project’s focus on reproductive and

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71 This is not to say that there are not multiple kinds of middle classes in American and globalized American contexts. However, in Ortner’s (2003) figuring of the habitus of class and discourse of class in the United States, there is a distinct idea of a unified middle-class, which is almost inseparable from American notions of ourselves.
marital histories with an eye to cultural context lend itself to this approach to the study of reproduction. This project helps to develop the relatively small literature on reproduction and the life course.

Modernity and Gender

Themes of the modern and the traditional echo through participants’ narratives. There are a variety of gendered ways that participants highlight their modern identities, most notably in this study through reproductive practice and couples’ framing of their relationships. Reproductive negotiation (Petchesky 1984) and kinship (Collier 1997) are social locations where gendered modernity is exhibited. My participants used their narratives of reproductive negotiations to construct themselves as modern by emphasizing themes of choice and “readiness” as an important element of their family formation. Elements of family planning were certainly in place for my participants, as many in heterosexual relationships chose not to have children and those with children most commonly had two. However, this narrative of rational choice and modernity was tempered with discussions of the role of fate or God’s plan in family formation.

Participants also framed their marriages in contrast to their parents’ “traditional” marriages. This builds on the literature on companionate marriages (especially Hirsch 2003). Participants across a variety of ages employed a modern/traditional dichotomy to differentiate their marriages from their parents’ (and grandparents’). As they emphasize partnership and teamwork in their marriages, they illustrate a difference from the gendered roles their parents’ inhabited in their marriages. In this difference, they are careful to discuss their parents’ marriage as a product of culture at the time and that it is not a bad way to organize a marriage, just a
different one. In this way, they are able to assert themselves as modern without abandoning notions of *familismo* or structures that some see as part of their cultural heritage.

**Gender in Heterosexual Relationships**

Despite participants’ emphasis on marriage as a partnership and individual preference as the most important organizing principle in the household, they also expressed a variety of gendered identities and roles. Participants of both genders emphasized women’s roles as nurturers and ten women emphasized women’s roles (either as wife or mother) as linked to the household. Participants of both genders linked men’s roles (either as husband or father) as breadwinner/provider (though not necessarily as a sole breadwinner). In describing the details of life, participants reveal gendered distinctions in their relationships.

In their reproductive narratives, fathers, voluntarily childless women, and voluntarily childless men commonly described getting married without in-depth discussions of reproductive goals or futures. Some had cursory discussions, but participants typically had not discussed the issue seriously. The only group that was likely to discuss reproductive goals as an important part of choosing a marriage partner was mothers. Motherhood was an important status and goal for them to achieve, so they sought partners specifically to do so. Some spoke of looking for men who they felt would be good fathers to their children, others spoke of marrying before they would have otherwise in order to ensure motherhood, and one even spoke of marrying and having children so that she could enjoy having sex.

It may not be surprising, then, that there is evidence that those in the voluntarily childless group spoke of their marriages in more egalitarian terms than parents did, generally using language of partnership, compared to parents, who generally used language of support. This is the context where prolonged periods of reproductive negotiation occur. Depending on the life
stage and individuals’ and couples’ goals, this can be stressful. Women, especially, report family members commenting on their not having children or “too few” children, though across all groups, participants argue that this is not pressure, and that they did not feel pressured. Instead, participants used their narratives to reframe these comments and acts. Some empathize with their family members’ points of view, structuring their narratives to show their blend of cultural competence (“this is common for Latinos/as”) and outsider perspective (“though I don’t agree with their approach”). They also may minimize pressures, saying pressures don’t affect them, invoking modern ideologies of individualism.

*Familismo, Personhood, and Gender*

Issues of personhood as tied to family formation and reproduction are more salient for women in my sample than for men. I find that women do kin work to maintain links and construct reproductive narratives, in part, around the cultural value of *familismo*. This is because women’s pathway to personhood in familial and cultural contexts are still tied up in the status of motherhood; women who do not become mothers often emphasize their nurturing nature and relationships with children in the family or the community to help mitigate their “failure” to become mothers. This is in conflict with middle-class expectations for women to hold professional careers, a goal that women say is important to their identity. So women must navigate these conflicts. Men’s gendered roles as husbands and fathers still center on the role of provider. This dovetails with middle-class career-based expectations, so they do not experience the same kinds of stress that women do. Their status in family and community circles does not depend on fatherhood the same way that women’s depends on motherhood.

My intersectional approach to understanding reproductive pressures and messages for heterosexual middle-class Latinos/as is attentive to expectations within one’s ethnic group, class-
based expectations, gender roles (and their relationships with kinship), and American discourse surrounding racialized Latino/a reproduction. It is in negotiating the intersections of these sometime contradictory pressures that my participants negotiate their gender identities and family formation. Participants have agency as individuals to negotiate these structures of power inequality and cultural expectations, and we see them employ this as they structure narratives of their marital and reproductive lives. However, they also shape how participants understand and frame their choices (for example, women’s emphasis on the characteristic of nurturing). In these nuanced negotiations, we can deepen our writing and theorizing of Latinos/as in the United States.

How We Think and Write about Latinos/as: Significance to Academic Literatures

Though I am by no means the first to work with middle-class Latinos/as, I do take a different approach than most. I use the lens of reproductive negotiation to understand gender and power in heterosexual couples, in kinship systems, and in an American context of stratified reproduction. It is my hope that this research is a drop in the bucket, a small push against the stereotypes about Latino/a reproduction that are part of American discourse and replicated in the academic literature. Politicians and fear-based groups warn of Latina “hyperfertility,” conjuring the “anchor baby” as a threat and warning that Latinos/as are orchestrating a reconquest of the United States. In reality, Latinos/as are not the fastest growing group in the United States anymore, and middle-class Latinos/as tend to have even fewer children than Latinos/as as a whole. For example, no one in my study had more than three children. Adding diversity to the ways that we talk about Latinos/as in American discourse and in the research questions we ask may help diversify public and academic perceptions of Latinos/as and shift prejudice and structural inequality for this group.
Class, Culture, and Assimilation

Research with middle-class Latinos/as has largely developed in the segmented assimilation literature. This work focuses on how Latinos/as are incorporated into American culture. This literature tends to focus on ethnicity and experiences in professional workplaces, though there are a few exceptions. My research does not take assimilation as a basis for analysis. I do not presume that Latinos/as are necessarily acculturated or assimilated to American culture because they have reached a certain social or economic class. Instead, my research focuses on intersectional analysis and pays attention to how participants mobilize cultural values to mitigate differential power. Moreover, my research uses theories of gender and power as an entry point to understanding this population. Segmented assimilation theory has not made strides in updating its approaches to gender and sexuality in over thirty years (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013).

My findings on *familismo* highlight the difference in my approach. Latinas’ narratives in my project indicated that the kind of family-first orientation and connection with family that characterize most descriptions of *familismo* are present. This orientation is largely bolstered by women, as they are the ones doing the kin work to keep connections among extended family; men do not focus on these themes or values as much in their narratives. Women benefit from family links when they are juggling career and motherhood. However, it is also part of their desire to stay in touch with their heritage. Though most participants moved out of neighborhoods (or countries) where their parents live, D/FW has a car culture. People are used to commuting not only for work, but also for leisure activities, so getting in the car to visit family is not generally considered a burden. Moreover, women in particular, make use of technology to keep these connections. This is not to say that distance has no effect, as some participants use physical distance to help mitigate opinionated parents and in-laws’ influence on their day-to-day life and
reproductive plans. Rather, it is not an insurmountable barrier to maintaining elements of *familismo*.

Rather than arguing that middle-class Latinos/as are assimilating into the middle class or developing a set of cultural elements in this space, “minority middle-class culture,” I emphasize the basic anthropological assertions that culture is dynamic and that people are both shaped by and actively shape their cultural contexts. Middle-class Latinos/as are used to navigating a variety of cultural contexts in their daily lives. As such, they navigate cultural messages in middle-class settings (such as work) that prioritize individualistic perceptions, but also family and community contexts where *familismo* and other Latino/a cultural values are expected. They teach their daughters that it is important to be independent, but also send children to their grandparents’ house for language (and “traditional” cultural) exposure. They prioritize education and career, but women also work to gain status in their families through motherhood. *Familismo* is still a salient concept in middle-class Latinos/as’ lives, in particular for Latinas, as they can leverage it to mitigate role conflict. In this way, my argument is more closely aligned with analyses of Latina identities as multivocal, moving within and between worlds, as seen in postcolonial and Chicana feminisms (e.g. Keating 2006) than with theories of assimilation. I find that middle-class Latino/as are negotiating dynamic cultural contexts, not assimilating to the middle-class.

Instead, my research adds to our understanding of the middle-class as a varied group in the United States. Participants in my study are part of an ethnic group that has traditionally been racialized in the United States, so they still experience prejudice based on their ethnic identity. This is likely to continue, as recent research has found that millennial Latinos/as feel racially Othered in the United States (Flores-González 2018) and discourses of “The Latino Threat”
(Chavez 2013) only seem to be intensifying in American political discourse. My close readings of Latinos/as’ narratives takes an intersectional approach to middle-class Latinos/as, looking at the specific ways that power structures intersect for my participants and how identity and cultural work happens in these spaces.

**Reproductive Negotiation and Family Formation**

My research contributes to the literature on Latino/a reproduction in the United States. It builds upon important critiques of researchers’ approaches to Latino/a reproduction and American cultural discourse of Latino/a reproduction (Gutiérrez 1999; Chavez 2004; Chavez 2013; Chavez 2017). These critiques argue that as scholars have utilized assumptions in assimilationist theory to construct their research questions, they have continued to reify the idea that Latinos/as have high fertility rates. My research takes this assertion to heart, instead assuming that Latinos/as in the United States have a wide variety of family forms, including not wanting children. The reproductive narratives from my participants illustrate that middle-class Latinos/as are not rejecting cultural values to have smaller families. Instead, they are negotiating and expanding them to fit their lives while engaging in extended kinship structures.

It similarly complicates research on reproduction in the United States. Research that does focus on Latino/a reproduction typically focuses on poor or working-class groups or on teenage pregnancy. Alternately, research often treats American women (or men) as a single group, without being attentive to ethnicity, assuming that an exclusively (or majority) Anglo sample is representative. My research illustrates that there may be variation among racial or ethnic groups’ identities, assumptions, and experiences in reproduction and family formation. For example, an unexpected finding in this project was that participants would often frame ARTs as the logical next step in reproductive practice when having trouble conceiving, but also distancing
themselves from it. Since some studies suggest this is also a larger pattern with no clear cause (e.g. Feinberg et al. 2007), careful qualitative research could shift our understanding of reproductive technology utilization.

Future Directions for Research

A possible future direction for research would be to collect reproductive narratives from middle-class Latinos/as in different areas of the United States with different local cultures and different migrant populations than Texas. Possibilities would be Miami, California, or New York City. This would allow the arguments I began in this study to be expanded to be more representative of the United States. A study set in a comparable location in a different local political context (Texas city versus California city, for example) might elucidate ways in which political climates affect gender, reproduction, and ethnic identity. Or, a study set in a city with a less established Latino/a community could show how family formation is shaped among middle-class Latinos/as when there is not a family network or community available nearby.

Another possible next step could be to complete research with another middle-class ethnic groups. This would illustrate what of my findings are particular to Latinos/as and which are found in many groups. This would indicate which are more culturally specific to an ethnic group and which may be adopted as part of a class identity. This would also contribute to our understanding of relationships between class and ethnicity in the United States.

Another fruitful direction for future research would be to delve into use of ARTs by Latinos/as. Latinos/as make use of ARTs less often than other groups in the United States. There is a hole in the literature, and economic gaps do not seem to explain the difference. My findings suggest that Latinos/as are very aware of the possibility of using ARTs and use them as a way to think about extending their reproductive windows. They are also comfortable with the rhetoric of
choice and consumerism around ARTs. A study focusing on this population could help illuminate why this is.

Shifting Contexts

In the last year-and-a-half, cultural anthropologists have been asking what their field research would now look like in the “Age of Trump.” This project is no exception. The discourses around a Latin “reconquest” of the United States has intensified. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has been given a new platform to flourish. The Trump administration seems to have a never-ending list of proposals intended to curb immigration that are cycled through. The fate of DACA—a program allowing people who immigrated to the United States as children to receive deportation deferments and work permit—is uncertain. There have also been political battles over whether detained unauthorized immigrants should be allowed access to abortion care and access to reproductive healthcare more generally. Two teenagers were detained, pregnant, and asked for abortions, which they were denied. With the help of the ACLU, they sued the Trump administration and a federal judge ruled in their favor. Though they were able to receive abortions, the Trump administration appealed, and the issue is still being fought in court (ACLU 2017).

Though the same themes surrounding the “Latino threat” narrative, immigration, and reproduction from this dissertation remain, discourse around these issues has escalated since my fieldwork. Additionally, law and policy around family planning and immigration are changing in ways that feel unpredictable. It remains to be seen how these intensifications will affect structural inequalities already present. My participants’ class status likely has some protective measures for them, but how will this play out on the ground? Will participants in this project be forced to reckon with racialized labels in ways they did not have to before? Will changes in
immigration policies deport DACA recipients? Are the rhetoric or realities of promises to deport “illegal” immigrants affect participants or their families? Will participants encounter new or intensified resistance to their reproductive choices and family formation? Will access to family planning resources be curtailed? Only time will tell.
## APPENDIX A:
SAMPLE OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Children?</th>
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</table>

*Immigrant Generation, where: 1^st=immigrant, 1.5=immigrated as child, 2^nd=parents immigrated, and so forth.

**Couples shaded together
APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Parents

Interview 1

1. How old are you?
2. What is your individual income? (Use scale if participant prefers)

Under $10,000
$10,000 - $19,999
$20,000 - $29,999
$30,000 - $39,999
$40,000 - $49,999
$50,000 - $74,999
$75,000 - $99,999
$100,000 - $150,000
Over $150,000

3. What is your household income?

Under $10,000
$10,000 - $19,999
$20,000 - $29,999
$30,000 - $39,999
$40,000 - $49,999
$50,000 - $74,999
$75,000 - $99,999
$100,000 - $150,000
Over $150,000

4. How do you describe your ethnicity?
5. Were you born in the United States?
   a. If yes, when did your family come to the United States?
   b. Where is your family from? (City, state)
   c. Do you have extended family in the United States?
      i. If so, who and where for each person/family unit.

6. What languages do you speak?
   a. What language did you primarily speak growing up?
   b. What language is primarily used in your home currently?

7. What is your level of education?

8. What is your job?
   a. How long have you worked there?
   b. What are your professional goals?

9. What is your religious affiliation?
10. Do you often attend religious functions?
11. Do you consider yourself religious?
12. Does your religion influence your values and opinions?
13. Who is in your family?
   a. Which of these people do you see or talk to regularly?
14. Who is in your extended family?
   a. Which of these people do you see or talk to regularly?
15. Are you married?
   a. Is this your first marriage?
   b. How long did you date before you were married?
16. Do you have children?
   a. How many, and how old are they?
   b. Are they from the union with your current partner?
17. When did you know that you wanted children?
18. How did you know that you wanted children?
19. Is it important to you to have children? Why?
20. Was it important to your parents that you have children?
21. Was it important to your partner that you have children?
   a. Is this something you discussed with her/him?
22. Describe your role as a mother/father.
   a. What responsibilities are associated with this?
23. Describe the ideal role of a mother/father.
24. Describe your role as a wife/husband.
   a. What responsibilities are associated with this?
25. Describe the ideal role of a wife/husband.

**Interview 2**

**Family History (Family of Origin)**

1. Who was in your family when you were growing up? (family of origin) Where?
2. What was your childhood like?
3. Who were you closest with in your family and why?
4. What were your relationships like with your parents?
   a. Other adults you were close with?
   b. (If applicable) Siblings?

**Marital History**

1. When did you start dating?
a. What was your dating life like in your teens? As a young adult? If applicable, as an adult?

2. How did you meet your current partner?
   a. Describe the progression of your relationship.
   b. Do you feel this relationship is different than other adult long term relationships you’ve been in?
   c. How did you decide to marry (or live together, if commonlaw)?
      i. What factors did you consider?
         I. Was desired family size a factor? Was it negotiated in the process? If there was a disagreement, how was it resolved?

3. How many children do you have?
   a. Did you feel pressure to have children?
   b. Are all of your children from this marriage?

4. For each child:
   a. When was the child born?
   b. Did you plan the child?
      i. **If so,** describe how this was decided.
      ii. Who got to make this decision
      iii. Were influences outside of the couple important in the decision?
      iv. **If not,** There are many reasons that individuals and couples may not plan pregnancies. Could you describe the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy?
   c. Did your position in your extended family change after you had a/this child? If so, how?

5. Do you currently take steps to plan pregnancies?

6. At any point did you feel pressure to have children from your partner?
   a. From anyone in your family?
   b. From anyone in your partner’s family?
   c. Did having children affect your standing in your family? (Compared to siblings who have had children, for example)

7. Did having children affect your work life?

**Change over time**

1. Were reactions to your decision to have children different when you were younger versus now?
   a. If so, how?
   b. If so, why do you think that is?

2. Have reactions been different from older and younger family members?
   a. What are some examples?

3. Have reactions been different from men and women?
a. What are some examples?
4. Do you think expectations about becoming a parent were different for your mother than for yourself? Father?
5. Do you think expectations about becoming a parent are different for your daughter than for yourself? Son?

Voluntarily Childless

Interview 1

1. How old are you?
2. What is your individual income? (Use scale if participant prefers)
   Under $10,000
   $10,000 - $19,999
   $20,000 - $29,999
   $30,000 - $39,999
   $40,000 - $49,999
   $50,000 - $74,999
   $75,000 - $99,999
   $100,000 - $150,000
   Over $150,000
3. What is your household income?
   Under $10,000
   $10,000 - $19,999
   $20,000 - $29,999
   $30,000 - $39,999
   $40,000 - $49,999
   $50,000 - $74,999
   $75,000 - $99,999
   $100,000 - $150,000
   Over $150,000

4. How do you describe your ethnicity?
5. Were you born in the United States?
   a. If yes, when did your family come to the United States?
   b. Where is your family from? (City, state)
   c. Do you have extended family in the United States?
      i. If so, who and where for each person/family unit.
6. What languages do you speak?
   a. What language did you primarily speak growing up?
   b. What language is primarily used in your home currently?
7. What is your level of education?
8. What is your job?
   a. How long have you worked there?
   b. What are your professional goals?
9. What is your religious affiliation?
10. Do you often attend religious functions?
11. Do you consider yourself religious?
12. Does your religion influence your values and opinions? If so, how?
13. Who is in your family?
   a. Which of these people do you see or talk to regularly?
14. Who is in your extended family?
   a. Which of these people do you see or talk to regularly?
15. Are you married?
   a. Is this your first marriage?
   b. How long did you date before you were married?
16. Do you have children?
17. Have you ever had children?
18. When did you know that you did not want children?
19. How did you know that you did not want children?
20. What are your reasons for not wanting children?
21. Was it important to your parents that you have children?
22. Was it important to your partner that you have children?
   a. Is this something you discussed with her/him?
23. Describe your role as a wife/husband.
   a. What responsibilities are associated with this?
24. Describe the ideal role of a mother/father.

**Interview 2**

Life History Questions, Childfree

**Family History (Family of Origin)**

5. Who was in your family when you were growing up? (family of origin). Where?
6. What was your childhood like?
7. Who were you closest with in your family and why?
8. What were your relationships like with your parents?
   a. Other adults you were close with?
   b. (If applicable) Siblings?
Marital History

8. When did you start dating?
   a. What was your dating life like in your teens? As a young adult? If applicable, as an adult?

9. How did you meet your current partner?
   a. Describe the progression of your relationship.
   b. Do you feel this relationship is different than other adult long term relationships you’ve been in?
   c. How did you decide to marry (or live together, if commonlaw)?
      i. What factors did you consider?
         I. Was desired family size (CF) a factor? Was it negotiated in the process? If there was disagreement, how was it resolved?

10. There are many ways that individuals and couples manage the size of their families. What steps are you and your partner taking to prevent becoming pregnant?
    a. Have you discussed not wanting to have children with your doctor? If so, what was the interaction like?
    b. Do you think you face any family planning challenges that someone who plans to have children would not?

11. At any point did you feel pressure to have children from your partner?
    a. From anyone in your family?
    b. From anyone in your partner’s family?
    c. Did not having children affect your standing in your family? (Compared to siblings who have had children, for example)

12. Did not having children affect your work life?

Change over time

6. Were reactions to your decision not to have children different when you were younger versus now?
   a. If so, how?
   b. If so, why do you think that is?

7. Have reactions been different from older and younger family members?
   a. What are some examples?

8. Have reactions been different from men and women?
   a. What are some examples?

9. Do you think expectations about becoming a parent were different for your mother than for yourself? Father?

10. Do you think expectations about becoming a parent are different for your younger relatives (for example, a niece) than for yourself? nephew?
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Constable, Nicole. 2007. Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers. Cornell University Press.


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