

Lessons in the Labors of Love: Situation Comedies and Family Governance in the 1980s

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Shelley, Amelie, L.S., and Megan.

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	1-15
<u>Chapter 1: Approaches to the Sitcom</u>	16-41
<u>Chapter 2: “I Can’t Help Feeling Maternal—I’m a Father!”: Domesticated Dads and the Career Woman Demographic</u>	42-94
<u>Chapter 3: Solving the Day Care Crisis, One Episode at a Time: Family Sitcoms and Privatized Child Care in the 1980s</u>	95-134
<u>Chapter 4: “You Could Call Me the Maid—But I Wouldn’t”: Lessons in Masculine Domestic Labor</u>	135-179
<u>Conclusion</u>	180-185
<u>Bibliography</u>	186-209
<u>Appendix 1</u>	210-213
<u>Appendix 2</u>	214
<u>Appendix 3</u>	215-216
<u>Appendix 4</u>	217-229

Introduction

In the United States during the 1980s, discourses of family, parenting, and domesticity permeated the cultural, social, and political landscape. The shift to a service economy and the disappearance of stable, union jobs, coupled with falling wages and rising cost of living, made it nearly impossible to maintain a middle-class lifestyle with one income.¹ Increasing numbers of women did not enter the labor force purely as a result of feminism's critique of domesticity, rather, many went to work out of economic necessity. The Reagan administration's welfare spending cuts collided with their ideological calls to strengthen the nuclear family. Ideals of free-market capitalism and individualism further appeared incongruous with the rhetoric of "family values." As Estella Tincknell points out,

the hegemony of family values was itself challenged by continuing and radical changes in household structures, sexual identity and marital models—and by the ideology of 'consumer choice' itself....Despite the political rhetoric, then, the 1980s saw an increase in single-parent households, a decline in marriages and a significant growth in divorce.²

Clashes over "family values," women in the workforce, childcare, domestic labor, and the changing composition of the nuclear family often played out in popular media, resulting in many critics' labeling of the Reagan era as rife with post-feminism or a backlash against feminism.

¹ Frederick R. Strobel, *Upward Dreams, Downward Mobility: The Economic Decline of the American Middle Class* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993).

² Estella Tincknell, *Mediating the Family: Gender, Culture and Representation* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 38.

Narratives of post-feminism and backlash see popular media as a driving force of these reactions to liberal feminism. In the foremost account, Susan Faludi details the backlash against feminism as a Reaganite neoconservative move that locates feminism as an evil that has made women unhappy, dissatisfied, and apparently, *more* oppressed.³ She locates backlash partly in film (with the ever-prominent example of *Fatal Attraction* [dir. Adrian Lyne, 1987]) and television, critiquing sitcoms (which she notes are traditionally woman-centered) for erasing women from families and making men better mothers than women ever were. Post-feminism takes a version of feminism for granted, suggesting that the goals of liberal feminism have been achieved, and thus feminist activism and organizing are no longer necessary. In the post-feminist imagination, feminism is considered to be outmoded or passé. Post-feminism is especially tricky and dangerous for feminist politics, as it incorporates some aspects of liberal feminism, such as a belief in workplace equality, while eschewing other aspects such as collective action. Critics often point to the media portrayal of career women and “new traditionalism” as exemplifying a post-feminist ethos in the 1980s. Here “choice” becomes the key word—in a post-feminist culture, women can *choose* to be working professionals or they can *choose* to be wives and mothers. Films like *Three Men and a Baby* (dir. Leonard Nimoy, 1987) and *Baby Boom* (dir. Charles Shyer, 1987), and television dramas like *L.A. Law* (NBC, 1986-1994) and *thirtysomething* (ABC, 1987-1991) serve as common touchstones for analyses of post-feminist media culture.⁴

³ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991).

⁴ See, for example Judith Mayne, “*L.A. Law* and Prime-Time Feminism,” in *Framed: Lesbians, Feminists, and Media Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a ‘Postfeminist’ Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Elspeth

Seemingly reinforcing claims of post-feminism, television programming retreated to the home in the 1980s, replacing the workplace sitcoms of the 1970s⁵ with a fresh crop of domestic family sitcoms.⁶ While at first glance, the prominence of this subgenre during the 1980s seems to point to the “new traditionalism” critics locate in *thirtysomething*,⁷ these sitcoms often trouble the career woman-mother “choice” binary, working through the contradictions of post-feminism rather than erasing them. The family sitcoms of the 1980s also incorporate elements of the workplace sitcom, in that they often position the home as a place of work rather than simply as a place of leisure. Instead of signaling a neoconservative return to the domestic nuclear family, and thus a return to the classic family sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s, sitcoms of the 1980s question the very definition of the nuclear family and of the domestic sphere. Many of these programs deal explicitly with the changing face of the family, heavily featuring divorced and “non-traditional” family units. Episodes often revolve around negotiating these “new” family arrangements, especially when it comes to parenting and housekeeping. These sitcoms aired overwhelmingly during the “family hour,” the first hour of prime-time, anticipating an audience of families viewing television together in the last few years before cable became pervasive enough to challenge network dominance and to splinter

Probyn, “New Traditionalism and Post-Feminism: TV Does the Home,” in *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, eds. Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D’Acci, and Lynn Spigel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126-137.

⁵ For example, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977), *The Bob Newhart Show* (CBS, 1972-1978), *Taxi* (ABC, 1978-1982; NBC, 1982-1983), *WKRP in Cincinnati* (CBS, 1978-1982), *M*A*S*H* (CBS, 1972-1983).

⁶ Family sitcoms peaked at 78% of all sitcoms in 1985, compared to 18% ten years earlier. See Appendix 2.

⁷ Probyn, “New Traditionalism,” 126-137; Sasha Torres, “Melodrama, Masculinity and the Family: *thirtysomething* as Therapy,” *Camera Obscura* 19 (1989): 86-107.

the mass audience into niche markets.⁸ By mid-decade, network programming included at least one family sitcom per evening, ensuring that families could tune in to see the foibles of other families any night of the week.

My dissertation looks at these domestic family sitcoms as pedagogical texts that offered guidelines to the families of the 1980s struggling with competing ideas about family, gender, parenting, and domestic labor. While providing lessons in family and household governance, these sitcoms simultaneously enact liberal feminist fantasies of family, work, and domesticity. The generic pleasures of the sitcom contribute to these fantasies—problems are introduced and harmoniously solved in each episode, maintaining familial love and domestic bliss. Sitcom families become familiar, reliable sources of amusement and pleasure at the same time that they impart domestic lessons. For the purposes of my project, I am defining “domestic family sitcoms” as programs taking place primarily in homes where raising dependent children is a primary source of plot material. Therefore my definition excludes family sitcoms like *Mama’s Family* (NBC, 1983-1984; first-run syndication 1986-1990) and *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-1979), in which the resident “children” are adults, as well as buddy and/or romantic domestic sitcoms like *Perfect Strangers* (ABC, 1986-1993) and *Mork and Mindy* (ABC, 1978-1982). My project considers the family sitcoms of the 1980s in conjunction with other media of the period, (especially newspapers and magazines), in order to think through how families (through parental heads of household and/or domestic laborers) were encouraged to govern themselves during this perceived crisis in the family. I look at the sitcoms not as propagating a dominant ideology about family and gender, nor as

⁸ See Appendix 4.

hegemonic tools for securing consent, but rather as sets of guidelines for organizing gender roles and family relations, for effective parenting, and for delegating household labor at a time when the television industry needed to appeal to middle-class women who were reorganizing their family and work lives. My dissertation brings together historical analysis of the television industry with a look at policy and political objectives, in order to examine the sitcoms of the 1980s as domestic and familial pedagogy. I show how network television's industrial imperatives during the 1980s link up with the broader political, cultural, and social landscape, a connection that helps explain the explosion of family sitcoms and the particular family governance guidelines they offer.

The majority of scholarship on sitcoms reads the programs as hegemonic—the arguments often suggest that through the sitcom's generic narrative development, problems and anxieties are introduced and ultimately contained in each episode (thus the “situation,” or the status quo, remains the same). For example, Bonnie Dow's analysis of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977) considers how the program incorporates feminist themes into the character of “The New Woman,” in Mary, a romantically unattached professional, yet undercuts its own version of feminism through Mary's constant deference to her male co-workers and her maternal characteristics.⁹ Rather than question whether or not this is what sitcoms do, I will look at the generic structure of sitcoms as pedagogical rather than hegemonic, considering how the narrative resolutions that so many critics read as hegemonic also work to solve various familial and domestic problems. While these programs may or may not be renewing consent to the nuclear

⁹ Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

family form, I am more concerned with how they put forth guidelines for family governance, and what exactly those guidelines are at a time when the meaning of the family was widely thought to be in flux. Here my approach is guided by a Foucaultian intervention into media studies that urges a move away from analyses of texts that decipher how they maintain the status quo toward a conception of media as a cultural technology that translates political rationalities and distributes rules and advice for citizenship and everyday life.

The bulk of scholarship on 1980s television focuses on “quality” or “yuppie” programs. For example, Jane Feuer’s *Seeing Through the Eighties* focuses exclusively on dramatic programming like *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981-1991), *L.A. Law*, and *thirtysomething*, seeing the dramatic development of the yuppie consciousness as the cornerstone of Reagan era television.¹⁰ Julie D’Acci’s landmark study of gender and 1980s television focuses exclusively on “quality” cop program *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS, 1981-1988).¹¹ Other studies focus on 1980s television’s turn to the “postmodern” in programs like *Max Headroom* (ABC, 1987-1988), *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-1989), *Moonlighting* (ABC, 1985-1989), *Pee-Wee’s Playhouse* (CBS, 1986-1990), and *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991), and in the music videos and other programming of MTV.¹² The work on 1980s

¹⁰ Jane Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

¹¹ Julie D’Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case of *Cagney & Lacey** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

¹² For example, John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Jim Collins, “Television and Postmodernism,” in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 327-353; John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987); Lynne Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987); John Pettegrew, “A Post-Modernist Moment: 1980s Commercial Culture & The

sitcoms has largely neglected family sitcoms (outside of *The Cosby Show* [NBC, 1984-1992] and *Roseanne* [ABC, 1988-1997]),¹³ instead focusing on workplace comedies such as *Designing Women* (CBS, 1986-1993) and *Murphy Brown* (CBS, 1988-1998).¹⁴ I hope to contribute to this scholarship by looking at the sitcoms that constituted the bulk of the prime-time schedule, but have thus far garnered little attention from media scholars and television historians.

Theory and Method

My approach is broadly inspired by feminist theory, feminist media studies, and Foucaultian theories of governmentality. I look at the programs as a cultural technology, part of a broader governing rationality where the conduct of families is shaped in part through their everyday engagement with media. Foucault's conception of government is very broad and does not locate government firmly within the State. Rather, he sees government as dispersed throughout culture and everyday life. He defines government as "the conduct of conduct," or the shaping of behavior, an action carried out by myriad institutions and technologies. Foucault's theory of governmentality suggests a move toward "governing at a distance" in liberal democracies, where we learn to govern

Founding of MTV," *Journal of American Culture* 15 (1992): 57-65; Lauren Rabinovitz, "Animation, Postmodernism, and MTV," *The Velvet Light Trap* 24 (Fall 1989): 99-112; Andrew Ross, "Masculinity and *Miami Vice*: Selling In," *Oxford Literary Review* 8 (1986): 143-154.

¹³ For example, Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream* (Boulder: Westview, 1992); Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Melissa Williams, "'Excuse the Mess, But We Live Here': Class, Gender, and Identity in the Post-Cold War Working-Class Family Sitcom" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009).

¹⁴ For example, Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism*; John Fiske, "Murphy Brown, Dan Quayle, and the Family Row of the Year" in *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Lauren Rabinovitz, "Ms.-Representation: The Politics of Feminist Sitcoms," in *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, eds. Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 144-167.

ourselves in part through culture. Governmentality refers to the modes, technologies, and practices that guide and shape behavior, and the ways people respond by shaping themselves in accordance with various norms. Media and cultural studies scholars such as Tony Bennett, Jack Bratich, James Hay, Laurie Ouellette, Jeremy Packer, and Gareth Palmer have taken up governmentality, suggesting the ways that various media and cultural institutions act as citizen-shaping technologies. In their introduction to *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*, Bratich, Packer, and Cameron McCarthy explain their Foucaultian approach to media, arguing that “In accordance with this move of studying culture in its relation to governing at a distance, we take culture to be a set of reflections, techniques, and practices that seek to regulate conduct.”¹⁵

Few governmentality scholars have considered the family in depth, though Nikolas Rose affords the family a prominent position in citizen-shaping,¹⁶ and he suggests that the family

has a key role in strategies for government through freedom. It links public objectives for the good health and good order of the social body with the desire of individuals for personal health and well-being. A ‘private’ ethic of good health and morality can thus be articulated on to a ‘public’ ethic of social order and public hygiene, yet without destroying the autonomy of the family—indeed by promising to enhance it.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy, “Governing the Present,” in *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*, eds. Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 8.

¹⁶ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd ed. (London: Free Association Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 74.

Jacques Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* provides a lengthy study of the development of family government in France.¹⁸ Perhaps most pertinent here, Donzelot traces the emergence of the “psy” disciplines as family experts in the mid-twentieth century, and argues that they “regulated images” of the family, thus encouraging families to emulate sanctioned examples. This governing technique marked a pronounced shift from the penal-oriented juvenile courts of the 18th and 19th centuries, which handed down severe familial interventions. These “regulated images” might translate to television families—as Stephanie Coontz argues, “our most powerful visions of traditional families derive from images that are still delivered to our homes in countless reruns of 1950s television sit-coms.”¹⁹ By working through governmentality, I consider sitcoms as a cultural technology that guides the conduct of families. Conceptualized in this way, the sitcoms serve as templates for family and household organization and management.

A feminist approach is equally important, as the sitcoms of the 1980s are particularly concerned with shifting gender roles, and since the 1980s as a whole are often considered to be the dawn of a post-feminist era. Feminist debates about domesticity and domestic labor will frame a good portion of my dissertation, especially as a number of the sitcom masculinize domestic labor in the figure of male housekeepers and domestic dads. I will use feminist theory to think through the pleasures and fantasies that this masculinization of domestic labor may have provided for contemporary women viewers trapped by the “second shift.” Arlie Hochschild describes the labor bind that has

¹⁸ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1979).

¹⁹ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 23.

left many women from the late 1970s onward handling both a career in the paid workforce and the demands of domestic labor and childcare at home:

The influx of women into the economy has not been accompanied by a cultural understanding of marriage and work that would make this transition smooth. The workforce has changed. Women have changed. But most workplaces have remained inflexible in the face of the family demands of their workers, and at home, most men have yet to really adapt to the changes in women. This strain between the change in women and the absence of change in much else leads me to speak of a “stalled revolution.”²⁰

My dissertation suggests that the family sitcoms of the 1980s in some ways painted a picture of family life pushing past this “stalled revolution,” where men completed much more of the household labor than women, and women successfully combined work and family commitments. Yet the sitcoms also dealt quite frequently with issues of maternal guilt and marital and familial strife. Combining elements of fantasy and identifiable situations, these sitcoms might have been particularly pleasurable for working mothers, at the same time that they provided guidelines for reforming masculinity and reorganizing family and domestic governance.

I study the particular lessons that sitcoms of the 1980s offer in their preoccupation with changing family formations and gender roles. The sitcoms offer lessons in both their form and content. For instance, every episode of *Mr. Belvedere* (ABC, 1985-1990) ends with Mr. Belvedere writing in his journal, reflecting on what he and the Owens

²⁰ Arlie Russell Hochschild with Anne Machung, *The Second Shift* (Penguin Books: New York, 2003), 13.

family has learned. He faces the camera and recites these lessons in voiceover, thus offering his wisdom to the viewer. Similarly, *Full House* (ABC, 1987-1995) usually ends with a heart-to-heart chat between one of the three caretakers and the children. The children learn a moral lesson, often at the same time that the caretakers learn lessons in parenting and household management. While not all of the sitcoms conclude so didactically, the form of the sitcom dictates that the problems that have plagued the family over the course of the episode must be resolved in some way before its conclusion. Family harmony is always restored, problems always overcome, thus the sitcom instructs in conflict resolution. In the 1980s, the lessons sitcoms provide change to reflect shifts in the nuclear family. Most of the family sitcoms of the 1980s revolve around lessons that deal with family organization, parenting, and domestic labor at a time when the make-up of the nuclear family and the strict gendered division of labor are beginning to change.

Programs that I study in-depth include *Benson* (ABC, 1979-1986), *Charles in Charge* (CBS, 1984-1985; first-run syndication, 1987-1990), *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-1989), *Full House*, *Growing Pains* (ABC, 1985-1992), *Kate & Allie* (CBS, 1984-1989), *Mr. Belvedere*, *My Two Dads* (NBC, 1987-1990), *Silver Spoons* (NBC, 1982-1986; first-run syndication 1986-1987), and *Who's the Boss?* (ABC, 1984-1992).²¹ In selecting programs, I have chosen sitcoms that deal explicitly with problems of family organization and/or domestic management, especially those that feature “non-traditional” family arrangements. In conjunction with the television programs, I look at popular press discourse on the family and related gender issues in major newspapers and magazines.

²¹ See appendix 1 for brief descriptions of the shows.

For example, at the same time that family sitcoms dealt with new childcare arrangements, women's magazines, business magazines, and newspapers also doled out advice about how to make the best childcare decisions. Numerous popular magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* dissected the phenomenon of the "superwoman," an idealized if unattainable figure who gracefully managed career, family, and household, and discourses about "stay-at-home dads" also began to crop up. At the same time, numerous congressional bills on day care were introduced and shot down, as Reagan and his followers attacked social programs. Finally, I look at television industry trade publications to determine how and why exactly the family sitcom rose to such prominence in the 1980s from the perspective of the industry, and how and to whom the sitcoms were marketed. The upper middle-class career woman emerged as a profitable demographic for television producers to cater to with sitcoms that reorganized the nuclear family and imagined different modes of family governance that included more extensive domestic roles for men. I complicate Amanda Lotz's argument that women became a profitable demographic in the post-network era with the rise of women-centered cable networks; I suggest that the family sitcoms of the 1980s set the stage for the niche marketing she studies, by soliciting middle-class professional women viewers (the same demographic Lotz sees served in 1990s programming like *Ally McBeal* [Fox, 1997-2002] and *Judging Amy* [CBS, 1999-2005]).²² My dissertation combines historical and textual analysis with feminist and Foucaultian theories, pointing the way toward a different theorization of the sitcom as pedagogical text or as a cultural technology governing the family, while contributing to

²² Amanda D. Lotz, *Redesigning Women: Television after the Network Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

television history by studying long-ignored but very popular programs, and by providing an analysis of the industrial imperatives of the late network era.

The first chapter introduces scholarly literature on sitcoms, and explains my theoretical approach. This chapter shows the longstanding interest in cultural politics, gender, and domesticity among television scholars. I trace the large body of work that reads sitcoms through hegemony and suggest ways that a turn toward governmentality asks different questions about television. The second chapter looks at the way sitcoms dealt with the “career” woman and the way men were encouraged to reorient themselves in relation to family and domesticity. I consider how the sitcoms broadly could be considered to provide a liberal feminist fantasy of “having it all,” complete with husband who assumes household and parenting duties. I look mainly at *Variety* to demonstrate how these sitcoms were pitched at professional women to appease advertisers. *Family Ties*, *Growing Pains*, and *Silver Spoons* all featured domestically involved fathers, and *Family Ties* and *Growing Pains* featured working mothers.

The third chapter argues that family sitcoms proposed solutions to the “day care crisis” of the 1980s, enacting solutions that the popular press and politicians often proposed, and refuting any claims for state-sponsored childcare. Family sitcoms modeled ideal private childcare arrangements that would have been highly improbable if not simply impossible for their viewers. Rather, the programs provide fantasy solutions to an ongoing struggle for most American families. *Full House*, *My Two Dads*, *Mr. Belvedere*, and *Kate & Allie* deal with the day-to-day struggles of arranging childcare, and all suggest that “live-in” help, in some form, is the ideal solution. With live-in childcare, the

family remains intact in the home, maintaining the family as an autonomous unit, albeit with a few extra members.

The fourth chapter looks at domestic labor and household management. *Benson*, *Charles in Charge*, and *Who's the Boss?* all feature men taking on the role of domestic laborer, a role they seem to transform into domestic “manager.” Indeed, as the title *Who's the Boss?* suggests, Tony Micelli's role as employee of Angela Bower does not mean that he is not “the boss” of the household. Similarly, *Charles in Charge* positions Charles as not only an erstwhile babysitter, but also as “in charge” of the family and domestic bliss. *Benson* takes the popular butler from *Soap* (ABC, 1977-1981) and makes him the glue that keeps the governor's mansion—and the government itself—together. This chapter deals with the ramifications of masculinizing domestic labor, as well as the perpetuation of racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies at the heart of domestic employment. These sitcoms might have been particularly pleasurable for female viewers, as “hunky” stars like Tony Danza and Scott Baio perform domestic labor with good cheer and charm.

Family sitcoms reached their two-decade peak of saturation and ratings success in the mid-1980s, making up 78% of total sitcoms on the air in 1985, and boasting four spots in the Nielsen top ten in 1986.²³ By the mid-to-late 1990s, despite the addition of Fox, UPN, and WB, ratings success largely eluded family sitcoms, with only *Home Improvement* (ABC, 1991-1999) cracking the Nielsen top ten between 1995 and 1997. The 1970s produced very few family sitcoms, with less than five on the air between 1973 and 1978. The explosion of family sitcoms in the 1980s, their longevity, and success all testify to the broader cultural and political obsession with redefining and/or restoring

²³ See Appendices 2 and 3.

family life. The sitcoms I examine in this dissertation offer up family governance templates and fantasies of household and work harmony to a generation of families grappling with dramatic socioeconomic changes and shifting expectations of gender, work, and domesticity.

Chapter One:

Approaches to the Sitcom

Scholars often recognize the situation comedy as one of the most prevalent and enduring television forms. Frequently set in domestic space and chronicling the daily lives of families, scholars see sitcoms as charting familial relationships in the context of social change. To this end, scholars regularly employ hegemony theory to read sitcoms as participating in the renewal of “common sense,” or dominant ideology. The very form of the sitcom clearly lends itself to this reading, as its episodic movement from equilibrium to disequilibrium and back to equilibrium recuperates disturbances to the status quo and resolves narrative tension. Read in this way, the sitcom appears to be constantly reaffirming “dominant ideology” with every episode’s happy ending. Several scholars write of this narrative convention as “containment,” wherein politically progressive strains of the programs are contained through each episode’s hasty plot resolution. This strand of scholarship is often concerned with television’s relationship to cultural politics, where feminist or antiracist political messages crop up and are contained by the sitcom, for example in the rich body of work examining *MTM* and *Tandem* sitcoms of the 1970s. These sitcoms are pivotal for television scholarship, signaling major shifts in the generic form of the sitcom as well as a watershed moment for considering the sitcom’s relationship to cultural politics.

Joanne Morreale sums up the predominant view of the sitcom’s relationship to cultural politics in her introduction to *Critiquing the Sitcom*, where she writes, “sitcoms

both incorporate and contain change; they both address and prevent political action, and they may be read as both conservative and progressive forms, sometimes simultaneously.”¹ The sitcom’s conventions facilitate this common mode of criticism. Paul Attallah challenges the conception of the sitcom’s dominant generic marker as the swing from equilibrium to disequilibrium and back, by arguing that this is the pattern of all genres.² For him, genres “are specific ways in which equilibrium is conceived, disrupted, and replaced.”³ Using *The Beverly Hillbillies* as his case study, Attallah firmly ties the sitcom to cultural politics, suggesting that issues of social class define the sitcom’s equilibrium and disequilibrium. The disruptions that characterize the sitcom, according to Attallah, are discursive, which set the genre apart from the western (where the disruptions are violent) and the melodrama and musical (where the disruptions have to do with desire). He further explains that the sitcom organizes disruption as discourse in two primary ways: “forms of behavior or of linguistic usage that become nonsense and gibberish (Lucille Ball, Jerry Lewis, the Marx Brothers), or it can set into play forms of behavior and action that are simply incommensurate with the situation (*The Beverly Hillbillies*, Charlie Chaplin).”⁴ More generally, Attallah argues that the sitcom consists of a clash of discursive hierarchies. He also provides the useful reminder that episodic narrative resolution only offers cursory closure, and that the situation that characterizes each sitcom can never be fully resolved during the program’s run.

¹ Joanne Morreale, “Introduction: On the Sitcom,” in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), xii.

² Paul Attallah, “The Unworthy Discourse: Situation Comedy in Television,” in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 91-115.

³ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

In “Genre Study and Television,” Jane Feuer argues that the sitcom, and all genres, for that matter, is a historical category that develops, shifts, and changes over time.⁵ She suggests that the sitcom can be recognized by its half-hour duration, its humor, and its “problem of the week” that causes comedy and is brought to resolution before the next episode. However, Feuer argues that the sitcom developed more of a tendency toward seriality in the 1970s. With sitcoms produced by MTM and Tandem, the problem/solution model shifted to deal with different problems, and the sitcom began to pay more attention to character development, a move which intensified the shift to seriality, a shift Feuer sees as becoming even more prominent with the “yuppification” of 1980s television on dramatic programs such as *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, and *L.A. Law*. For Feuer, MTM sitcoms were more remarkable for their character development and seriality, whereas Tandem sitcoms were more influential in changing the nature of sitcom “problems.” With the popularity of 1980s serials, Feuer suggests that the MTM model was ultimately more successful, however she points to genre development as a cyclical process that later begat *Roseanne* and *The Simpsons* in a Tandem model and *Murphy Brown* in an MTM one. In “MTM Style,” Feuer expands on her examination of MTM sitcoms, suggesting that MTM developed “character comedy,” which downplays the importance of the “situation” in the sitcom. The MTM sitcoms became associated with “quality TV” through “complex characters, sophisticated dialogue, and [viewer]

⁵ Jane Feuer, “Genre Study and Television,” in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 138-160.

identification.”⁶ MTM sitcoms disproved the idea that the sitcom is a static form that eschews character development, as they rely heavily on characters. Rather, Feuer suggests that the sitcom prevents the development of complex plot. Combining rich characters with an impetus toward viewer identification, the MTM sitcom spearheads a movement toward “warmedy,” or a mixture of melodramatic pathos with comedy. The warmedy formula persists in 1980s sitcoms, which often resolve by teaching heartwarming lessons in family harmony.

Anna McCarthy points out that the sitcom’s serial impulse most often revolves around romantic narrative arcs and the formation of couples.⁷ After Ellen’s coming out on *Ellen*, McCarthy suggests that the program folded because it could not produce a lesbian relationship commensurate with the sitcom’s seriality. As she puts it, Ellen’s coming out episode made for “event TV,” but ABC could not conceive of *Ellen* as “uneventful” TV, where Ellen’s sexual and romantic relationships developed over time. Thus, as the genre develops into a more “quality” form (per Feuer’s argument), it reaffirms heterosexual romance and squeezes out queer desire. Alexander Doty makes the inverse argument about *Laverne and Shirley*, reading it as a lesbian narrative wherein the (episodic) sitcom form moves Laverne and Shirley through heterosexual romantic couplings and encounters as the disequilibrium of the narrative, only to return them by the end of each episode to the equilibrium of their own same-sex coupling.⁸

⁶ Jane Feuer, “The MTM Style,” in *MTM ‘Quality Television,’* eds. Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi (London: British Film Institute, 1984), 36.

⁷ Anna McCarthy, “*Ellen*: Making Queer Television History,” *GLQ* 7, no. 4 (2001): 593-620.

⁸ Alexander Doty, “I Love *Laverne and Shirley*: Lesbian Narratives, Queer Pleasures, and Television Sitcoms,” in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 187-208.

George Lipsitz and Mary Beth Haralovich each detail the early sitcom's realism as an important element of television's address to the family. Lipsitz shows how ethnic working-class sitcoms of the late 1940s and early 1950s negotiated anxieties about postwar consumer culture by tapping into popular memory.⁹ These programs worked through Depression and wartime values, showing audiences how to adapt to postwar affluence. For Lipsitz, these sitcoms used realist cultural specificity and ethnic traditions in order to initiate different groups into middle-class consumer culture. They were set in modest apartments located in recognizable ethnic neighborhoods (e.g. The Bronx, Harlem). True to the sitcom's problem/solution format, Lipsitz argues the ethnic working-class sitcom solves problems through consumer purchases. These purchases, signifying entrance into consumer culture, solve the narrative problem and work to ease the transition of the characters and the viewer from a Depression mentality into an affluent middle-class one. Haralovich studies sitcom realism in aesthetic terms, showing how *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*'s deep focus cinematography and meticulously consumerist middle-class mise-en-scène worked to naturalize and idealize the position of the homemaker and middle-class affluence in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁰ Haralovich suggests that the careful placement of consumer appliances in well-kept rooms and the arrangement of gendered domestic spaces (e.g. kitchen for women, den for men) also shift the focus of the comedy from gags and slapstick (as in *I Love*

⁹ George Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television Programs," in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 71-108.

¹⁰ Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sit-coms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 111-141.

Lucy or *The Honeymooners*) toward comedy based in familial relationships. Both Lipsitz's and Haralovich's essays point toward the importance of realism for viewers, suggesting that realism (either in plot or in aesthetics) can contribute to a pedagogical slant to the sitcom, wherein the viewer might model her/himself after the family members on the programs (in Lipsitz's case, moving toward an assimilation of consumerist values, and in Haralovich's case, moving toward an acceptance of the breadwinner/homemaker division of labor).

Nina C. Leibman examines similar territory to Haralovich, dealing with family sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹ Leibman takes a different approach to the genre, however, situating the sitcoms of this period alongside family melodrama films. She argues that when these sitcoms are “shorn of their laugh tracks and the critical assertion that these programs are indeed ‘funny’—these series bear the unmistakable generic markers of domestic family melodrama, characterized by the same familial strife and reconciliation.”¹² The film melodramas translated social problems into family problems and solved them through familial love. She draws on Horace Newcomb's delineation of domestic comedy, whose generic conventions include “a strong sense of place, an emphasis on warmth, a narrative trajectory based on moral dilemma and instructive resolution” to support her reading of sitcoms as family melodrama.¹³ Rather than simply reinforcing the nuclear family as an ideal to be aspired to, Leibman suggests that the micro problems the sitcom families face point toward dysfunction. The fact that weekly

¹¹ Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

arguments over a raise in allowance, denial of the right to date or getting cut from a school sports team could threaten familial harmony might actually point to the instability of the nuclear family unit rather than positioning it as utopian. While Leibman locates the sitcom's melodramatic tendencies primarily in the 1950s and 1960s, she suggests that it returns in the family sitcoms of the 1980s, briefly referencing correlations between film melodramas *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Ordinary People*, and *Terms of Endearment* and sitcoms *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show*. For her, these 1980s incarnations of family sitcom melodrama echo their predecessors primarily in their privileging of the role of the father as head of household and supreme problem-solver.

Lynn Spigel examines the hybrid genre of the “fantastic family sitcom” of the 1960s, suggesting that by merging the conventions of the sitcom with those of science fiction, these programs self-reflexively mocked the suburban family sitcoms that Leibman and Haralovich study.¹⁴ Spigel points out that by the mid-1960s, the suburban family sitcoms failed to reflect the social, cultural, and political turmoil of the decade, and that the fantastic family sitcom incorporated anxieties around the space race, women's liberation, and civil rights. The sitcom provided a perfect forum to express these anxieties “because it offered ready-made conflicts over gender roles, domesticity, and suburban lifestyles, while its laugh tracks, harmonious resolutions, and other structures of denial functioned as safety valves that diffused the ‘trouble’ in the text.”¹⁵ The fantastic family sitcoms worked as parodies of the suburban family sitcom by retaining the generic form but contrasting the content, thus denaturalizing middle-class

¹⁴ Lynn Spigel, “From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sitcom,” in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

domesticity. Spigel argues that although the supernatural powers of Jeannie on *I Dream of Jeannie* or Samantha on *Bewitched* are contained by each episode's resolution, they escape total containment and total resolution by returning each week and threatening middle-class domestic decorum.

Many scholars approach the sitcom as a site for struggle over meanings, where cultural politics play out, where consent to the status quo is re-won with a bait and switch of incorporating "progressive politics" and containing them with a hasty resolution. John Fiske articulates this approach in his study of *Murphy Brown*, suggesting that the program

served as an important site where the discourse of 'family values' could be fought over, where the meanings of each of the phrase's two heavily laden words could be contested, and where people could relate those meanings to the conditions of their everyday lives. The show was a discursive 'relay station': it drew in the already circulating discourse of 'family values,' boosted its strength, directed it slightly leftward, and sent it back into circulation again.¹⁶

Fiske reads *Murphy Brown* as participating in a cultural and political struggle over the meanings of family, working women, abortion, race, and class. While on the one hand *Murphy Brown* pushed "family values" "slightly leftward" in allowing Murphy to bear and parent a child sans husband, on the other hand, the program reinforced a "pro-life" political stance, as Murphy ruled out abortion as an option. Herman Gray reads *The*

¹⁶ John Fiske, "Murphy Brown, Dan Quayle, and the Family Row of the Year," in *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 24.

Cosby Show in a similar manner, seeing it as a very conflicted text in terms of black cultural politics.¹⁷ On the one hand, *The Cosby Show* showcased a black middle-class family in stark opposition to the Reaganite “sign of blackness” (often made up of welfare queens, gang members, and crack babies), but on the other, it eschewed any sustained engagement with black politics or issues facing a majority of African Americans. Gray reads Cliff Huxtable as a correlate of Clarence Thomas, arguing that Reagan era conservatives could hold these figures up as “model minorities” in order to veil their racism. Gray reads sitcoms, as Fiske does, as sites for struggle over meaning, in his case, the struggle over the meaning of blackness.

Bonnie Dow rigorously conforms to the mold of hegemony theory in her study of prime-time television’s engagement with feminist politics.¹⁸ She produces case studies of sitcoms from the 1970s and 1980s in order to show how television incorporated elements of feminist politics only to quell their political potential. Dow is mainly concerned with how television encourages viewers to read its narratives in particular ways, and thus with how viewers are encouraged to think about feminism. She argues that *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* incorporated a liberal feminist view of women as independent and capable of holding professional careers, however it mitigated this feminist strain through positioning Mary as subordinate to the men in the office and through her passive and accommodating personality. Dow considers *Designing Women* to be the most feminist of any of the sitcoms she studies, primarily because it often dealt with women’s issues

¹⁷ Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

¹⁸ Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

and featured female collectivity, which Dow suggests provides multiple definitions of femininity and multiple points of identification for female viewers.

Taking a similar approach, Darrell Y. Hamamoto considers how the sitcom has continually renewed consent to liberal democratic ideology from early television through the 1980s.¹⁹ He reads sitcoms like *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* as working through cultural anxieties over redlining (the invasion of the Other into white middle-class neighborhoods) and reads *Bewitched* and *The Flying Nun* as sowing seeds of feminism that were ultimately contained through narrative resolution. He argues that the sitcom is a “means of achieving and maintaining the structured consensus so vital to the ongoing legitimacy of the liberal democratic state.”²⁰ Yet Hamamoto also shows that because the sitcom is so dependent on conflict for its plots, it cannot help but challenge the values it ultimately appears to uphold. However, he aligns the sitcom with the liberal democratic ideology that he argues it supports, arguing that its form seeks equilibrium and self-regulation. Hamamoto sees the sitcom as a balancing act between the corporate capitalism that produces it and the liberal democratic subjects it seeks to entertain.

L.S. Kim also uses a hegemonic framework to read sitcoms as participating in the process of “racialization.”²¹ Rather than focusing on the narrative conventions of the sitcom as containing progressive politics, however, Kim looks at how an often marginalized character—the maid or domestic laborer—serves to uphold and confirm racial and gendered hierarchies. Along with Fiske, Gray, and Dow, Kim sees sitcoms,

¹⁹ Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

²¹ L.S. Kim, “Maid in Color: The Figure of the Racialized Domestic in American Television,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997).

and television in general, as participating in and producing cultural discourse about race, class, and gender. The racialized domestic (Kim points out that even the white servants are most often white ethnic) becomes central to the sitcom's definition of whiteness. Ron Becker makes a related claim about gay characters and gay-themed programming in the 1990s, arguing that they mainly serve to uphold heterosexuality as the norm.²² He also aligns gay characters with black maids, demonstrating that gay characters occupy an otherwise heterosexual world, just as black maids occupy an otherwise white one. Kim argues that the sitcoms and their cultural context are not causally related, but rather that they interact with each other. She traces shifts in the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the television servant alongside shifts in cultural politics, wherein during the civil rights movement, black servants such as *Beulah* disappeared and were replaced by Asian servants on programs like *Bonanza* and *The Courtship of Eddie's Father*. Kim sums up her theoretical approach by noting, "prime-time programs tend to create, re-create, and revise history and too easily explain away social problems. In studying television, what we can see is not so much our 'reflections' of or on society, but rather, mechanisms for coping with and controlling social change."²³

Kirsten Marthe Lentz takes a different approach to the relationship between cultural politics and television, considering the ways in which the split between MTM and Tandem sitcoms helped to produce a split between feminist politics and antiracist

²² Ron Becker, "Gay Material and Prime-Time Network Television in the 1990s," in *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

²³ Kim, "Maid in Color," 152.

politics, in the end suggesting that the two are incommensurable.²⁴ Lentz looks at discourse surrounding the production companies as well as the programs they produced in order to analyze the disparate modes of representation aligned with gender politics and racial politics. Feminism became associated with the “quality” TV of MTM, which implied a critique of television as an aesthetic medium, whereas the “relevance” of Tandem became associated with racial politics that sought an authentic or realist image. MTM, through its associations with “quality” and feminism, by proxy aligned these terms with whiteness, the professional middle-class, and heterosexual femininity, and positioned this image of feminism against Tandem’s associations with racial politics and working-class culture. This opposition between the two production companies underscored critiques of liberal feminism as being strongly rooted in the white middle-class. Tandem’s *Maude* serves as a battleground for the clash between liberal feminism and racial politics, and Lentz argues that through the character of Maude, Tandem locates white racism in a feminist figure, primarily through Maude’s interactions with her black maid Florida. Thus *Maude* figures racism as a peculiarly feminist problem. Lentz suggests that this struggle over the meanings of feminism and racial politics on television contributed to the divergence between feminism and antiracism in left politics.

A major strength of hegemony theory approaches to sitcoms is their engagement with cultural and historical context. These scholars approach sitcoms not merely as texts, but rather as cultural and historical artifacts. This approach also takes sitcoms seriously and suggests that they have real cultural, political, and social potential. McCarthy notes

²⁴ Kirsten Marthe Lentz, “Quality versus Relevance: Feminism, Race, and the Politics of the Sign in 1970s Television,” *Camera Obscura* 43 (2000): 45-93.

that the sitcom is often considered “a barometer of social change,” as scholars and popular critics alike delight in chronicling television’s “firsts,” among them *Ellen*’s coming-out episode.²⁵ Hamamoto sums up the oft-cited relationship between the sitcom and cultural politics, noting, “The television situation comedy as a historically specific expression of social and political struggle, has proven to be infinitely adaptable to shifting power relations in postwar American society.”²⁶ One drawback of this approach is the tendency toward foregone conclusions. This literature becomes quite predictable as most studies conclude that sitcoms had progressive potential, but this potential was ultimately undercut by the narrative impulse toward resolution, often read as the renewal of hegemonic consent. The fact that the very genre conventions of the sitcom lend themselves to this sort of reading only makes it more ubiquitous and suggests the need for scholarship that will go beyond this framework. McCarthy begins to point the way, refusing to ask whether or not *Ellen* is progressive, and George Lipsitz and Mary Beth Haralovich begin to look at the sitcom as a pedagogical device. Lipsitz’s and Haralovich’s respective essays retain the historical and cultural approach that hegemony theory often supplies, but they also consider sitcoms as teaching viewers lessons beyond renewing common sense. Lipsitz shows how ethnic working-class sitcoms taught viewers how to realign their sensibilities in order to assimilate into consumer culture, and Haralovich shows how suburban sitcoms taught homemakers how to conduct themselves as middle-class consumers. While both of these essays can be read as adhering to hegemony theory—the programs both Lipsitz and Haralovich look at appear to be trying

²⁵ McCarthy, “*Ellen*,” 595.

²⁶ Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter*, 11.

to secure consent for middle-class consumer culture—both authors avoid stopping at this easy conclusion and instead consider sitcoms to be didactically instructing the viewer in particular ways of life.

Gender, Labor, and Family

Again and again, television scholars note the sitcom's generic investment in gender and family politics—as Spigel claims, “the domestic situation comedy was, by its very nature, predicated on the gender conflicts of the American family.”²⁷ For many scholars the sitcom both challenges and reinforces traditional gender roles, often within the nuclear family. Scholars often see comedy as a potentially subversive force, yet the sitcom's narrative conventions seem to mask or undercut its subversion. Much of this work focuses on female comic leads—most often Lucy, Roseanne, and Murphy—or on the hegemonic nuclear family, as figured most clearly in suburban family sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s. Scholarship on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* fits into neither of these categories neatly, as Mary is not an overly comedic figure, and she has no domestic family. However, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* is critical to thinking through the sitcom as a genre embroiled in defining gender and the family, as it famously ushered in the “workplace family,” and defined the “liberated woman” of the 1970s.

Ella Taylor provides an in-depth look at the representations of family on television, focusing particularly on the 1970s.²⁸ Taylor considers the sitcom as “a continuous chronicle of domesticity that has provided a changing commentary on family

²⁷ Spigel, “From Domestic Space,” 128; Dow, Haralovich, Leibman, Mellencamp, Morreale, Rowe, and Taylor make similar claims.

²⁸ Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

life.”²⁹ She suggests that the sitcom’s preoccupation with everyday life marks some familial formations and behaviors as normal and others as deviant. Her interest in the 1970s lies in her delineation of two dichotomous directions the sitcom took: broken or dysfunctional families on the one hand (which she attributes primarily to Tandem productions like *All in the Family*) and happy, harmonious work families on the other (e.g. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*). Taylor approaches sitcoms as sites for contesting meaning, much in the same vein as other scholars working with hegemony theory, suggesting that sitcoms work to reinforce dominant ideas of gender and family. She considers the sitcoms of the 1970s to be part of an anomalous period of more politically progressive ideas infiltrating television, a period bracketed by the more “conservative” sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s, which she sees returning with a vengeance in the 1980s (her examples are *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*). She lambasts the sitcoms of the 1980s for what she sees as a cursory attempt to critique the nuclear family, arguing,

The ‘family pluralism’ suggested by the episodic series in the 1980s is weak and tentative, acknowledging more the *variety* of family forms than the *struggle* over meanings of family at the level of gender, race, class, and generation and at the intersection of family with the public world of work. Moreover, family pluralism exists in tension with, and may be contained by, the more monolithic forms and meanings of the top-rated family shows, which insist on a rigidly revisionist interpretation of family life.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ Ibid., 166. Original emphasis.

Here Taylor once again privileges the “struggle over meaning” as the primary utility of the sitcom. She implies throughout the book that those sitcoms that present such struggle are “good” or “progressive” sitcoms, and those that do not merely engage in “toothless sermonizing.”³¹ Taylor references Feuer’s discussion of the serialization of the sitcom in the 1970s in order to argue that as the sitcom’s form becomes looser and its episodic resolutions messier, it becomes more difficult for the sitcom to contain its conflicts. On the other hand, Susan Douglas argues that in the late 1960s and 1970s, the television industry sought to capitalize on feminism’s appeal while ultimately containing its political threat.³² She suggests that programs like *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* put “feminist rhetoric in the mouths of ridiculous sitcom characters” like Ellie May, Granny, and Lisa, only in order to mock it.³³

Kathleen Rowe’s work on *Roseanne* mainly concerns the excess the sitcom allows in the figure of Roseanne (both actor and character).³⁴ Working with a feminist sociological framework that critiques feminine body and behavioral ideals, Rowe idealizes Roseanne as challenging gender decorum through her physical presence. Roseanne’s large body and her propensity for vulgar behavior fly in the face of feminine middle-class ideals. Rowe sees the sitcom as a privileged site for what she calls female unruliness, where women can break patriarchal society’s rules. She contrasts women on sitcoms to women in film, arguing that television frees women from their position as

³¹ Ibid., 167.

³² Susan J. Douglas, “The Rise of the Bionic Bimbo,” in *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

³³ Ibid., 196-197.

³⁴ Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

object of the (male) gaze and allows for active forms of performance such as slapstick. Lauren Rabinovitz also discusses the place of feminine excess in sitcoms, suggesting that *Designing Women* and *Murphy Brown* poke fun at excessively feminine characters Suzanne Sugarbaker and Corky Sherwood.³⁵ For Rabinovitz, feminine excess is an integral part of what she labels the feminist sitcom, which relies on liberal feminist heroines who eschew feminine excess (thus Murphy is set up in contrast to Corky, Julia Sugarbaker to Suzanne, Mary Richards to Sue Ann Nivens, Dorothy Zbornak to Blanche Devereaux, etc.).

Patricia Mellencamp's work on sitcoms has been especially influential.³⁶ She focuses primarily on joke-making and comedic language, but also deals with slapstick physical comedy. She uses containment as her major concept—the ways in which women are contained in sitcoms and in domestic space. She reads the linguistic comedy of Gracie Allen on *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* as consistently subverting patriarchal authority. Gracie is, as Mellencamp puts it, “rigorously logical,” making it difficult for George to contradict or “reason” with her. Mellencamp argues that Gracie always “wins” the narrative, because of her overly literal interpretation of language, however George always manages to contain her through a last laugh, a knowing look, and through his direct address to the audience, where he literally controls the form of the program. Lucy, on the other hand, always loses the narrative of *I Love Lucy*, as she never manages to escape containment in the home and secure employment. However,

³⁵ Lauren Rabinovitz, “Ms.-Representation: The Politics of Feminist Sitcoms,” in *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, eds. Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 144-167.

³⁶ Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, and Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

according to Mellencamp, Lucy always wins performatively, through her physical comedy. She consistently ruins Ricky's act, upstaging him and all of the other performers and guest stars on the program. *I Love Lucy's* feminist impulse, its critique of the gendered division of labor that left Lucy plotting her escape every week, was abruptly halted at the end of every episode with the reconciliation of Lucy and Ricky.

Mellencamp suggests that both *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* and *I Love Lucy* create a double bind for the female comedian and female spectator, where the woman is both the subject and the object of jokes. Mellencamp draws on a Freudian paradigm of jokes, where women are the object between two male subjects. While Mellencamp does not want to dismiss Freud, she also cannot fully resolve the comedy of these programs within his model, as his theory cannot account for women as joke-makers. She suggests that female viewers might have both laughed at these programs and felt uneasy, as the conflicts and desires Gracie and Lucy dealt with and felt may have hit too close to home for women also struggling to escape confinement in the home. Indeed, Lori Landay suggests that *I Love Lucy* may have been so popular because of its attention to gender conflicts within the idealized nuclear family in the postwar era.³⁷ Still, Mellencamp points out that "Given the repressive contradictions of the 1950s, humor might have been women's weapon and tactic of survival, ensuring sanity, the triumph of the ego, and pleasure."³⁸ Continuing in this vein, Mellencamp critiques Rowe's attention to Roseanne's body, arguing that because the sitcom is so dependent on dialogue, Roseanne's position as joke-maker is more important than her physical

³⁷ Lori Landay, "Millions 'Love Lucy': Commodification and the Lucy Phenomenon," *NWSA Journal* 11 (1999): 25-47.

³⁸ Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 338.

appearance. Part of Roseanne's subversive humor is her working-class mode of speech, alongside her imperfect grammar. Her jokes regularly challenge patriarchal middle-class ideals, especially those pertaining to femininity and motherhood. Mellencamp sees this as a "radical revision" of the Freudian model, where patriarchy subs in for woman as the object of the joke. However, *Roseanne* contains Roseanne's subversion through maintaining the centrality of marriage and the nuclear family.

Leibman argues that the sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s produced the middle-class nuclear family as ego-ideals for viewers. She suggests that in these sitcoms, the father occupies a privileged position and the mother "is stripped of her domain over 'expressive needs' in favor of the patriarch, who now presides over not only 'instrumental and executive tasks,' but is also the primary caregiver, object and transmitter of love, and locus of discipline and vindication."³⁹ The father achieves this position within sitcoms through several different means. Leibman shows that through dialogue and narrative control, the father asserts power over the rest of the family. In *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Father Knows Best*, for example, the children direct all questions and queries to their fathers, while their mothers quietly look on, and even when the mother asks the children a question, the answer is directed toward the father. These sitcoms further underscore the primacy of the father by making him both the disciplinarian and the praise-giver. The fathers' jobs allow them an inordinate amount of time in domestic space (e.g. Alex Stone on *The Donna Reed Show* ran his pediatrics practice in his home), thus challenging the mother's domestic authority. Leibman points out that curiously, the fathers spend more time at home than the mothers

³⁹ Leibman, *Living Room Lectures*, 118.

on these programs. The patriarchs practice “good liberal parenting techniques,” which often punish the children through passive aggressive means such as guilt (especially in *Father Knows Best*), such that the children come to their own realizations about their wrongdoing. Thus the father wields power without appearing too overbearing. The mise-en-scène and staging of the programs similarly promote the father’s power and the mother as playing only a supporting role in the family. Leibman shows how dinner scenes often feature the father and children sitting together while the mother weaves in and out serving the meal and missing much of the conversation. For Leibman, these sitcoms uphold middle-class ideals of gender roles within the family, though by reading the programs as melodramas, she sees cracks in the ways in which the nuclear family functions.

Haralovich looks at the same programs, but focuses primarily on the role of the homemaker within them. Haralovich considers the sitcom as one mode of constructing gender identities and organizing the family that operates alongside the consumer product industry, new suburban housing design, and the burgeoning field of market research. These forces combined to produce, naturalize, and idealize the subject position of the middle-class homemaker-consumer. Haralovich claims that the lag between the height of 1950s consumerism and the popularity of the suburban family sitcoms in the late 1950s and early 1960s indicates the sitcom’s “ability to mask social contradictions and to naturalize woman’s place in the home.”⁴⁰ Haralovich considers *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* as carefully circumscribing strict gender roles within the family and reinforcing a gendered division of labor among spouses. Still, the consumerist ethos of

⁴⁰ Haralovich, “Sit-coms and Suburbs,” 112.

the programs minimizes the amount of labor Margaret and June perform, as it implies that consumer household appliances have greatly decreased their domestic workload. These appliances allow Margaret and June more time to spend “making the home” for their family through emotional labor. They are not harried or overburdened by housework, making it easier for them to spend “quality time” with their husbands and children. Their lack of heavy domestic labor also allows for a more glamorous and affluent appearance, such that June often completes household chores in heels and pearls. Yet, as Haralovich notes, “Margaret and June are not so free from housework that they become idle and self-indulgent. They are well-positioned within the constraints of domestic activity and the promises of the consumer product industry.”⁴¹ Haralovich sees these sitcoms, and their enduring popularity, as evidence of the melding of gender and class hierarchies, as well as of their naturalization. *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* at once produce and reinforce normative gender identities and their attendant positions in the nuclear family.

Kim approaches domestic labor from a different angle, examining how the sitcom family’s paid domestic laborers work to define the family as white and middle-class. She takes a different look at the homemaker’s domestic labor, suggesting that rather than consumer appliances making life easier, the maid makes life easier, allowing the homemaker freedom from the more unpleasant household chores. She traces representations of maids and domestic laborers from the 1950s through the 1990s, claiming,

⁴¹ Ibid., 137.

the constitution of the 1990's American household has changed as has the construction of the family, but the figure of the domestic servant remains, 'serving' to uphold certain ideals (of the structure of work, the home, the family, patriarchy, middle-classness, and whiteness).⁴²

Kim argues that sitcoms provide images for viewers to aspire to and images after which to model their own families. Kim attends to the racial and gender dynamics of the sitcom family, showing how the white middle-class woman gains leisure and in some ways escapes confinement in the home through her own subordination of an Other, often a woman of color or someone of a markedly different class (such as the white ethnic servants of the 1980s and 1990s). She notes, "with the advent of women managing servants, some women attempt to escape (or at least circumvent some of the burdens of) sexism—through class and racial privilege."⁴³ The consistency of household servants over 40 years of television programming, Kim asserts, soothes cultural anxieties about the changing nature of families and shifting gender roles. Even when women move into the workplace in family sitcoms such as *Who's the Boss?* and *Mr. Belvedere*, there remains a prominent domestic laborer who can care for the family and the household. Kim's analysis is innovative in her focus on what are often considered minor or peripheral characters (though *Beulah* is named after the maid, Kim notes that we never see her life outside of the home for which she works), and she demonstrates how vital these characters are to constituting the gender, race, and class politics of the nuclear

⁴² Kim, "Maid in Color," 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

family. After all, as Kim points out, the Bradys' maid Alice occupies the center square in the iconic *Brady Bunch* title sequence.

The majority of this scholarship relies on textual analysis in some form, often subscribing to some version of hegemony theory which sees sitcoms as renewing consent to dominant notions of gender and labor within the nuclear family. Rowe's work draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, as well as feminist theories of the body, and Mellencamp's work draws heavily from Freud's theories of jokes and humor. Leibman's work is the most rigorous in textual analysis, as she draws from a comprehensive sample of episodes of many different shows and provides rich detail about the programs' narrative and stylistic conventions. One benefit of this textual approach is the specificity of evidence—Leibman very clearly shows how the programs work to position the father as benevolent head of household, for example. Haralovich and Kim present similar approaches to placing the sitcom within historical context with an eye toward how its representations uphold dominant cultural and social values. Their attention to the historical context of the sitcoms is very important, although their conclusions about the maintenance of dominant ideologies can seem a bit too pat. Mellencamp's use of Freud is innovative in her close analysis of the structure of humor and joke-making in the sitcom. While Leibman suggests we might think of sitcoms outside the realm of the comedic, Mellencamp takes seriously the way humor and comedy work within the sitcom. Her suggestion that humor might be a coping mechanism for women both onscreen and in their living rooms challenges some of the

conclusions of the more hegemony-minded scholars who see dominant ideology renewed again and again.

Sitcoms as Pedagogy

I aim to move beyond the hegemonic framework that seeks to delineate how sitcoms renew consent to dominant ideology. However, I retain this approach's attention to situating the sitcom texts within the cultural, social, and political context of the 1980s. Rather than looking at how these sitcoms incorporate and contain "progressive" politics, I consider how they work as weekly pedagogical tools that provide guidelines and advice for family organization in the face of the breakdown of the neat division of labor in the middle-class nuclear family. I would like to extend the work of Lipstiz and Haralovich in their preliminary suggestions for how sitcoms can work as lessons in identity formation and in everyday life. I would also like to take up Kim's call for more attention to domestic labor in the sitcom. However, while her contribution is important in its theorization of the sitcom as a process of racialization, I focus on how the domestic laborers of the 1980s teach lessons in domestic and family management. I also draw from Mellencamp's concept of containment, especially in relation to Kim's work, in order to consider the class and gender dynamics of the sitcoms which feature domestic laborers hired by working women. I use textual analysis to show how the programs work pedagogically on a formal level. Finally, I consider how sitcoms work alongside and in tandem with other media to offer advice on family organization and governance, parenting, child care, and domestic labor.

As a genre, family sitcoms have long offered lessons and morals, as Haralovich, Leibman, and Lipsitz have pointed out. These three scholars have set the groundwork for considering sitcoms as cultural technologies in their studies of early television sitcoms, though none of them directly engages with Foucaultian theories. While these scholars do not frame their analyses using governmentality, their consideration of sitcoms as citizen-shaping, pedagogical texts points the way toward incorporating governmentality studies into television studies. More recent work in television studies has paved the way for thinking through governmentality and television. Gareth Palmer's work on nonfiction programming in Britain suggests we consider television as part of "culture-as-management, where culture is a set of *practices* aimed at producing—in line with governmental objectives—self-regulating, self-governing individuals."⁴⁴ Laurie Ouellette and James Hay argue that reality television circulates guidelines for viewers to regulate themselves in accordance with a neoliberal rationality.⁴⁵

My dissertation extends this approach to fictional programming, arguing that sitcoms of the 1980s disseminated templates for family life to viewers who were increasingly struggling to deal with competing demands of work and family. Foucault's notion of government links up well with family life. As Thomas Lemke shows,

In addition to control/management by the state or the administration, "government" also signified problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul,

⁴⁴ Gareth Palmer, *Discipline and Liberty: Television and Governance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 18.

⁴⁵ Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV: Television and Post-Welfare Citizenship* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

etc. For this reason, Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as “the conduct of conduct” and thus as a term which ranges from “governing the self” to “governing others.”⁴⁶

From this perspective, sitcoms provide lessons in childrearing, household management, and daily navigation of home and work life at a time when families were coming to terms with the economic realities that made two-paycheck households the necessity for maintaining a middle-class standard of living.

⁴⁶ Thomas Lemke, “‘The Birth of Bio-politics’: Michel Foucault’s Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-liberal Governmentality,” *Economy and Society* 30 (May 2001): 191.

Chapter Two:

“I Can’t Help Feeling Maternal—I’m a Father!”: The Domesticated Dad and the Career Woman Demographic

In the early 1980s, U.S. network television was in trouble. Following two consecutive labor strikes and a football strike, compounded by sagging ratings, changing demographics, aging programs, and failed pilots, tides finally began to turn for the networks as they shifted their schedules toward family-oriented situation comedy. This shift was further precipitated by debates over the “family viewing hour” and pressure groups like the Coalition for Better Television, which decried a lack of morality on television, developments that were complicated by the networks’ recognition that they needed to appeal to non-nuclear family households. The networks’ financial troubles and their advertisers’ demands for desirable demographics led to an increase in cheaper, profit-driven programming that could attract young adults and children as well as a newly defined “working women” demographic¹--programming that had the potential to remain in primetime for many seasons while reaping more financial gains in syndication.

This chapter traces the shift toward “new” family sitcoms through focusing on the two stock protagonists these programs overwhelmingly favored: the career woman and the “domesticated” dad. By looking at three popular iterations of these characters (Elyse and Steven Keaton on *Family Ties* [NBC, 1982-1989], Maggie and Jason Seaver on

¹ For a detailed overview of the development of this demographic during the late 1970s and 1980s, see Julie D’Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney & Lacey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 63-104.

Growing Pains [ABC, 1985-1992], and Edward Stratton on *Silver Spoons* [NBC, 1982-1986; first-run syndication 1986-1987]) and the programs on which they appeared, I argue that sitcoms based on “new” families at once solved network television’s crisis while providing models of family life for a new generation coming to terms with the changing culture and economy of the 1980s. These models worked to shore up faith in the continued viability of the family unit at a time when the nuclear family was being simultaneously ideologically defended and socioeconomically undermined by the Reagan administration. As Jacques Donzelot argues,

It has become an essential ritual of our societies to scrutinize the countenance of the family at regular intervals in order to decipher our destiny, glimpsing in the death of the family an impending return to barbarism, the letting go of our reasons for living; or indeed, in order to reassure ourselves at the sight of its inexhaustible capacity for survival.²

Family Ties, *Growing Pains*, and *Silver Spoons* placed great faith in the survival of the nuclear family, while guiding families to readjust their expectations of gendered roles. These programs present pedagogies of masculinity that help renegotiate domestic life in order to maintain the family unit despite its slightly altered form. As Nikolas Rose suggests, the family is governed “through the promotion of subjectivities, the construction of pleasures and ambitions, and the activation of guilt, anxiety, envy, and disappointment.”³ The sitcoms promote a masculine subjectivity that embraces

² Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 4.

³ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd ed. (London: Free Association Press, 1999), 213.

domesticity and childrearing, enabling successful and equitable dual career couples who work to instill similar values in their children. On the side of the networks, the promotion of a domesticated masculinity was a calculated move to attract professional women as an upwardly mobile consumer group. Family sitcoms helped pull the networks out of a slump at the same time that they modeled revised gender and familial roles for millions of Americans, and provided fantasies of co-parenting and shared domestic chores for women viewers.

Bob Knight, regular *Variety* television writer, sounded a whistle in January 1980, claiming that the networks were having trouble figuring out why their previously popular series were losing viewers. He suggested, “the possibility does exist that the mass audience is going through one of those changes in taste that occurs about every five years—and that could put a chill in any programmer at any web as he [*sic*] tries to fathom where that audience wants to go next.”⁴ Throughout the early 1980s, networks tried to buoy their failing, long-running sitcoms (Knight lists *Happy Days* [ABC, 1974-1984], *Three’s Company* [ABC, 1977-1984], *Soap* [ABC, 1977-1981], and *Taxi* [ABC, 1978-1982; NBC, 1982-1983], among others) by pairing them with new sitcoms and launching spin-offs like *Joanie Loves Chachi* (ABC, 1982-1983) and *Benson* (ABC, 1979-1986). *Variety* devoted countless columns to detailing the networks’ ordering of new sitcom pilots;⁵ in fact, NBC, running last place in the ratings for several consecutive seasons,

⁴ Bob Knight, “Networks Search for New Series Trend: CBS Chases ABC While NBC Dreams of Olympics,” *Variety*, Jan. 9, 1980, 224.

⁵ “ABC Looks Ahead To Midseason With Crop of Comedies,” *Variety*, Aug. 20, 1980, 50+; “ABC Puts On A Comic Face,” *Variety*, May 12, 1982, 452+; “CBS Takes Light-Hearted Approach to ’82-83 Sked,” *Variety*, May 12, 1982, 451+; “Four Sitcom Pilots Ordered By CBS,” *Variety*, Feb. 6, 1980, 95; Dave Kaufman, “New CBS Pilots Heavy on Comedy; Shoot 11 Dramas,” *Variety*, Mar. 3, 1982, 70; Bob Knight, “New ABC-TV Schedule Accents Comedy: Web Promises Stronger Pix,” *Variety*, Apr. 30, 1980, 151; Bob

saw a new emphasis on sitcoms as key to its comeback strategy.⁶ At the same time, NBC Entertainment president Brandon Tartikoff was quick to note that his schedule would steer clear of “The standard half-hour sitcom—the one without a big star or a novel concept,” which he thought could be “heading into a declining phase, like the Western some years back.”⁷ A few critics debated the quality of the newer sitcoms, suggesting they were a far cry from the “edgy” sitcoms of the 1970s. Über producer Norman Lear blamed obsession with the bottom line for this perceived “decline” in sitcom quality. Speaking at the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce in 1980, Lear complained that “The content of television comedy is in a state of regression, reminiscent of bland, mindless, unstimulating comedies of the 1950s.”⁸ Knight also admitted concern that primetime programming was skewing toward “light-hearted” fare featuring “physically-fit hunks of manhood.”⁹

These “hunks of manhood” represented one strategy for reaching an upscale women’s audience, provided that they performed a particularly domestic form of masculinity. One marketing study suggested that commercials featuring “male models participating in household tasks” were well-received among female consumers.¹⁰

Knight, “Season, At Long Last, Is In High Gear: Sked Stability May Be Elusive,” *Variety*, Oct. 29, 1980, 37+; “MGM Pilots: Lots Of Comedy,” *Variety*, Apr. 6, 1983, 39+.

⁶ “Comedy In The Fall For NBC Primetime,” *Variety*, May 7, 1980, 577; Dave Kaufman, “NBC To Accent Comedy Series For Midseason,” *Variety*, Sept. 8, 1982, 93+; Bob Knight, “NBC Pilot Crop Leans To Comedy,” *Variety*, Mar. 24, 1982, 262+; Bob Knight, “NBC Sked: It’s Tartikoff’s Baby,” *Variety*, May 5, 1982, 113+; Bob Knight, “Silverman Builds Stairs Out of Cellar: Sitcom Strategy is Still the Key,” *Variety*, Mar. 5, 1980, 55+; Bob Knight, “Tartikoff Endures At NBC To Cope With 82-83 Sked; Sees 7-9 Hours Of Change,” *Variety*, Apr. 14, 1982, 34+.

⁷ Qtd. in John Dempsey, “‘We’re Optimistic,’ NBC Sez In Planning For Its Affil Meet,” *Variety*, May 14, 1980, 118.

⁸ “TV Comedy Smells, Says Lear; Ratings War Hurts Viewers,” *Variety*, Apr. 30, 1980, 150.

⁹ Bob Knight, “Webs Off On A Fool’s Errand?,” *Variety*, May 12, 1982, 451.

¹⁰ Mary C. Gilly and Thomas E. Barry, “Segmenting the Women’s Market: A Comparison of Work-Related Segmentation Schemes,” *Current Issues and Research in Advertising* 9 (1986): 151.

Marketers scrambled during the late 1970s and 1980s to define and understand what they perceived as a newly fragmented women's demographic. As Valarie A. Zeithaml notes, "in July 1977, demographic and lifestyle changes in American females were the subjects of a special issue of the *Journal of Marketing*," and her article in the same publication seven years later was still consumed by the subject.¹¹ Rena Bartos became a prominent voice among advertisers and marketers with a series of articles and her book *The Moving Target: What Every Marketer Should Know About Women*,¹² which divided women into four discrete categories: career working women, just-a-job working women, plan-to-work housewives, and stay-at-home housewives. Bartos' research, which suggested that the intention or desire to be in the workforce was more important in establishing a woman's consumer behavior than whether or not she was actually employed outside the home, was taken up in multiple studies and articles in the 1980s.¹³ In marketing journals, Bartos' work was mobilized in the hopes of figuring out how to reach the largest number of women. As a 1985 article in the *Journal of Advertising Research* laments, "No longer do marketers have the luxury of advertising solely to the housewife to reach the majority of the market. In fact, it is not clear today that the dichotomy of the housewife versus the

¹¹ Valarie A. Zeithaml, "The New Demographics and Market Fragmentation," *Journal of Marketing* 49 (Summer 1985): 64.

¹² Rena Bartos, *The Moving Target: What Every Marketer Should Know About Women* (New York: Free Press, 1982). Bartos' other oft-cited publications include: "Beyond the Cookie Cutters," *Marketing and Media Decisions* (1981): 54-59; "The Moving Target: The Impact of Women's Employment on Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Marketing* (July 1977): 31-37; "What Every Marketer Should Know About Women," *Harvard Business Review* 56 (May-June 1978): 73-85.

¹³ See for example, Thomas E. Barry, Mary C. Gilly, and Lindley E. Doran, "Advertising to Women with Difference Career Orientations," *Journal of Advertising Research* 25 (Apr/May 1985): 26-35; Gilly and Barry, "Segmenting the Women's Market," 149-170; Ved Prakash, "Segmentation of Women's Market Based on Personal Values and the Means-End Chain Model: A Framework for Advertising Strategy," *Advances in Consumer Research* 13 (1986): 215-220; Sandra Salmans, "Banishing Clichés in Advertising to Women," *New York Times*, Jul. 18, 1982; Charles M. Schaninger and Chris T. Allen, "Wife's Occupational Status as a Consumer Behavior Construct," *Journal of Consumer Research* 8 (Sept. 1981): 189-196; Zeithaml, "The New Demographics," 64-75.

career woman is an appropriate categorization of the changing woman.”¹⁴ In 1986, an article in *Current Issues and Research in Advertising* studied which representations of women were most appealing to particular segments of the women’s market. Mary C. Gilly and Thomas E. Barry devised three sample magazine covers, one using homemaking themes, another using career themes, and a third using “generic,” supposedly neutral themes, and surveyed women across Bartos’ categories on their preferences. To Gilly and Barry’s surprise,

the homemaker ad was not the most effective for the low [desire to work] segment. Rather, the generic ad was the preference for this group. One would expect women with low desire to work to find a homemaker message most appealing. However, it is possible that the attention given working women in recent years has discouraged these women from identifying with a homemaker theme.¹⁵

The suggestion that even homemakers did not respond positively to images of women as homemakers makes the so-called “moving target” of the women’s demographic even more opaque. In 1981, *Variety* reported, “Housewives favor commercials of women in liberated roles more than commercials of femmes in the more traditional roles of wife and mother.”¹⁶ Julie D’Acci cites one advertising executive’s proposed solution to the problem:

Target the “professional woman.” According to [corporate vice president of Colgate-Palmolive Tina] Santi, although professional women were still

¹⁴ Barry, et al., “Advertising to Women,” 26.

¹⁵ Gilly and Barry, “Segmenting the Women’s Market,” 163.

¹⁶ “Women Like ‘Liberated’ Blurbs,” *Variety*, May 27, 1981, 40.

a small percentage of total working women, they were “the *conspicuous consumers*...the role models [who] have enormous influence on the 41,000,000 women who are wage earners today.”¹⁷

In order to reach these role models, television produced sitcoms featuring female characters these demographically desirable women could aspire to—successful career women who were *emotionally* supported by domesticated dads who picked up household chores and childcare without hesitation or complaint. The networks received positive feedback on this trend from the National Commission on Working Women, which praised

“the emergence of men as nurturers as one of the most encouraging signs” of the fall lineup. “Instead of being locked into aggressive roles, some male tv characters on the new fall shows actually care for their children, love their children—and do so without being objects of ridicule,” the report said.¹⁸

The report noted that 76% of female characters on television were working outside the home. At the same time, sitcom career women maintained many elements of the homemaker image, perhaps so as not to completely alienate a fragment of the women’s market. Thus family sitcoms both managed to appeal to their target market of career women while providing a fantasy of seamless combination of career and family for women who may not have been career women themselves, but who were attracted to the popular media image of the new woman.

¹⁷ D’Acci, *Defining Women*, 69. Original emphasis.

¹⁸ “Womens’ [*sic*] Roles On TV & Radio Getting Better,” *Variety*, Jan. 9, 1985, 100+.

Appealing both to working and non-working women, Elyse Keaton, the mother on *Family Ties*, manages to thrive as an architect by having her workspace in the kitchen of the family home. This allows her to pursue her own career while remaining a devoted “stay-at-home mom” and domestic manager, with the help of a supportive husband invested in “women’s lib.” In *Growing Pains*, Maggie Seaver goes back to work as a newspaper reporter, and Jason Seaver moves his psychiatric practice into their home. His profession makes him remarkably well-suited to dealing with the foibles of their three children in between seeing his patients. *Silver Spoons* revolves around Edward Stratton learning how to be a father to the son he never knew he had. A textbook case of arrested development, Edward must learn to set aside his video games to parent son Ricky. His growing aptitude for nurturance attracts the romantic attention of his maternal personal assistant Kate, resulting in the formation of a nuclear family where both parents manage to work at home. These programs provided idealized models of career women managing to “have it all” with the support of husbands who performed a sensitive, emotionally invested, and domestically-oriented masculinity. These domesticated dads functioned both as figures in a liberal feminist fantasy of heterosexual romance and family life, and as models for a new masculine ideal that privileged traditionally “feminine” characteristics such as nurturance and family care. However, the aims of network executives were less about shifting gender roles and more about creating content that would bring in advertising dollars at the lowest production cost, and advertising dollars were being spent on programs that attracted professional women.

Targeting the “Working Woman” of the 1980s

In the 1970s, marketers struggled to understand what they loosely defined as “working women,” a supposedly new demographic group with enhanced spending power that complicated earlier monolithic notions of the housewife, often known as “Mrs. Consumer.”¹⁹ As Ved Prakash narrates the development of this strand of marketing research, studies began by comparing working and non-working women,²⁰ then compared women’s political views,²¹ and finally looked at different types of women’s employment and their attitudes toward their work.²² Many of Prakash’s citations come from the *Journal of Marketing*’s July 1977 issue, which published eight articles about the importance of finding new ways of marketing to a diversified women’s demographic.²³ Barbara Hackman Franklin, then commissioner of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, opened the issue with an editorial that proclaimed, “Marketers, take heed: Consumerism and the women’s movement are strong, active allies that reinforce each

¹⁹ This term is usually attributed to Christine Frederick and her book *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: The Business Bourse, 1929).

²⁰ He cites Beverlee B. Anderson, “Working Women vs. Non-Working Women: A Comparison of Shopping Behavior,” in *1972 Combined Proceedings*, eds. Borris W. Becker and Helmut Becker (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1972), 355-357; Suzanne H. McCall, “Meet the ‘Workwife’” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977): 55-65; Mary Joyce and Joseph P. Guiltinan, “The Professional Woman: A Potential Market Segment for Retailers,” *Journal of Retailing* 54 (Summer 1978): 59-70.

²¹ He cites Susan P. Douglas and Christine D. Urban, “Life Style Analysis to Profile Women in International Markets,” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977): 46-54; Fred D. Reynolds, Melvin R. Crask, and William D. Wells, “The Modern Feminine Life Style,” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977): 38-45.

²² He cites Bartos, “The Moving Target,” 31-37; Bartos, “What Every Marketer,” 73-85; Shreekant G. Joag, James W. Gentry, and JoAnne Mohler, “Explaining Differences in Consumption by Working and Non-Working Wives,” in *Advances in Consumer Research* Vol. 12, eds. Elizabeth Hirschman and Morris Holbrook (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1985), 582-585; Schaninger and Allen, “Wife’s Occupational Status, 189-196.

²³ McCall, “Meet the ‘Workwife,’” 55-65, Douglas and Urban, “Life Style Analysis,” 46-54, Reynolds et al, “The Modern Feminine Life Style,” 38-45; Bartos “The Moving Target, 31-37, William Lazer and John E. Smallwood, “The Changing Demographics of Women,” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977): 14-22; Marianne A. Ferber and Helen M. Lowry, “Woman’s Place: National Differences in the Occupational Mosaic,” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977): 23-30; Dan H. Robertson and Donald W. Hackett, “Saleswomen: Perceptions, Problems and Prospects,” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977): 66-71; William J. Lundstrom and Donal Sciglimpaglia, “Sex Role Portrayals in Advertising,” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977): 72-79.

other.”²⁴ She further suggested that marketers needed to drastically revise their strategies for reaching female consumers, warning that “women no longer find their hopes and dreams in a jar or behind a mop; they can be turned off if you try to tell them they should.”²⁵

In the same issue, Suzanne H. McCall introduced what she termed the “workwife,” whose impact on marketing she deemed “revolutionary.”²⁶ McCall furthered Franklin’s claim, arguing that this vital demographic could not be reached through advertising images of women as housewives and/or sex symbols. She also warned marketers that the most desirable workwives, those under age 55, rarely looked at newspaper advertisements; rather, two-thirds of them spent their free time watching television.²⁷ McCall sketched the workwife in great detail, describing her influence over family members, her increased purchasing power, and perhaps most importantly, her role as a “trendsetter” who inspires other women to follow in her consumer footsteps.²⁸ The working woman’s spending power created much excitement in many accounts. While women had long been perceived as the primary household consumers, according to many market researchers, working women exercised more independence over big-ticket or luxury items, rather than waiting to consult their husbands.²⁹ These observations made their way into the popular press as well, with the *New York Times* labeling professional

²⁴ Barbara Hackman Franklin, “Guest Editorial,” *Journal of Marketing* 41 (July 1977):10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶ McCall, “Meet the ‘Workwife,’” 55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁹ Zeithaml, “The New Demographics,” 64-75; McCall, “Meet the ‘Workwife,’” 55-65; Prakash, “Segmentation of Women’s Market,” 215-220.

women “free-wheeling spenders,”³⁰ and noting that they are “likeliest to have the most disposable income.”³¹

While advertisers were eager to capitalize on all this supposed disposable income, the television networks struggled to put together programming that they could afford which would appeal to advertisers and their target markets. With cable and independent stations beginning to cut into the networks’ viewing audience, CBS, NBC, and ABC had even more trouble guaranteeing demographics to their advertisers.³² At the same time, advertising sales were slow and unpredictable in the early 1980s, due to low ratings, various labor strikes, and threats of product boycotts from social conservatives.³³ CBS refused to guarantee specific demographic groups for the 1982-83 season, resulting in “considerably less business upfront than either ABC or NBC.”³⁴ An executive with advertising firm Young and Rubicam complained, “CBS is not adjusting its programming to reach the audience the advertiser wants to reach.”³⁵ A testament to the importance of desirable demographics to advertisers, the network acquiesced to agency demands and reversed their decision for the 1983-84 season.³⁶ Meanwhile, the networks began to

³⁰ Ruth La Ferla, “Flaunting Success,” *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1988.

³¹ Salmans, “Banishing Cliches.”

³² John Dempsey, “Rating Drop Worries Networks: Clearances Off, Cable Indies Show Big Gains,” *Variety*, July 2, 1980, 1+.

³³ Jack Loftus, “No Rush To Buy Fall TV Season: Wait For Web Moves To Juice Up Skeds,” *Variety*, Oct. 29, 1980, 1+.

³⁴ Jack Loftus, “Record Upfront Primes 4th Qtr. Sales: TV Webs Pocket A Cool \$700-Mil,” *Variety*, Nov. 3, 1982, 64.

³⁵ Qtd. in “Buyers Handicap The Season: ‘Gloria,’ ‘Newhart’ To Survive; Web Shares Continue To Slide,” *Variety*, Sept. 29, 1982, 90.

³⁶ Jack Loftus, “CBS Yields To Agency Demands, Makes Demographic Guarantees,” *Variety*, Jul. 27, 1983, 43+.

employ more and more market researchers in their attempts to make good on their demographic promises.³⁷

As it has been throughout television history, the most desirable demographic was women ages 18-54. However, this demographic was splintered in the 1980s, when networks sought to reach the professional wife and mother, thought to come home from work and watch the first hour of primetime along with her children.³⁸ As Lauren Rabinovitz shows,

Foreseeing a national economic shift in consumption stimulated by the baby boom generation coming of age, advertising agencies began earmarking two-thirds of their advertising budgets to address consumers under fifty, and television executives merely followed suit by catering their products to the ‘demographic’ products (the audience) for which the advertisers were looking. The extent to which such strategies became thoroughly internalized policies in the 1980s is best summarized by CBS broadcast vice president for research David Poltrack: “The affluent, upscale woman between twenty-five and fifty-four is [now] the primary target of advertisers.”³⁹

Thus the prized demographic shifted slightly older, and networks showed more interest in programming that was attractive to (and appropriate for) these women’s children.⁴⁰

³⁷ “Society’s Flux Forces ABC Into Research Expansion,” *Variety*, Oct. 21, 1981, 60+.

³⁸ “Web Prime Spots Get \$1.5-Billion; ABC Rate Down,” *Variety*, July 30, 1980, 1+.

³⁹ Lauren Rabinovitz, “Sitcoms and Single Moms: Representations of Feminism on American TV,” *Cinema Journal* 29 (Fall 1989): 7.

⁴⁰ “Agencies Predict NBC to Stay on Top,” *Broadcasting*, Aug. 11, 1986, 48+; “CBS Breaks ABC’s Hold On Women,” *Variety*, Feb. 11, 1981, 89.

In the middle of the 1981-82 season, Marvin Mord, vice president of ABC Marketing and Research wrote in *Variety* that changes in family structure “have posed a twofold challenge to tv marketers and programmers: to provide advertisers with ways to reach their target audiences more effectively and develop tv programs which appeal to contemporary American tastes and lifestyles.”⁴¹ He further called on the television industry to feature working mothers in primetime, a call that was answered (ironically not by his own network) in the 1982-83 season with the debut of *Family Ties* on NBC. However, Mord’s network did premiere *Webster* the following season, and *Variety* implicitly announced the beginning of a new primetime era when it announced that “ABC’s ‘Benson’ and ‘Webster’ have come on to wrest the time period leadership away from CBS’ ‘The Dukes Of Hazzard.’”⁴² The trend continued when ABC’s Tuesday night lineup of *Who’s the Boss?* (ABC, 1984-1992) and *Growing Pains* beat *The A-Team* (NBC, 1983-1987), a feat announced in *Variety*’s cover story declaring 1985 “Year of the Sitcom.”⁴³ Implicit in these ratings fights is a battle of masculinities—the rough-and-tumble, traditional masculinity of *The Dukes of Hazzard* (CBS, 1979-1985) and *The A-Team* versus the softer, affable, more domestic father figures of the new family sitcoms.

These sitcoms positioned men in domestic roles, which market research suggested was universally attractive to women in the 19-54 bracket, regardless of occupational status. They likewise hedged their bets in their representations of women, allowing them careers, but spending the bulk of their onscreen time in the home. The sitcoms’ inclusion

⁴¹ Marvin S. Mord, “Webs Look At New Demos: Research On TV Values,” *Variety*, Jan. 13, 1982, 170.

⁴² Bob Knight, “2d Season Chemistry,” *Variety*, Feb. 1, 1984, 42.

⁴³ Bob Knight, “Year of the Sitcom for TV Nets: ‘Cosby’ Sets Precedent, ABC Hits on Tuesday,” *Variety*, Dec. 4, 1985, 1+.

of children, both young and teen idol-age, made the shows even more attractive to the networks and advertisers, as children were a key demographic group in off-network syndication. The family sitcom glut of the 1980s worked through a standardized set of characters in order to keep costs low, attract the most desirable demographics, and make the highest profit. Indeed, the sitcoms of the 1980s made unprecedented syndication deals worth billions of dollars. Though the profits belonged to the production companies rather than the networks, ratings of primetime sitcoms could only improve with audience exposure to reruns in the late afternoon and early evening hours. By the mid-1980s, production companies heavily promoted their popular sitcoms for syndication, and the pages of *Variety* were full of articles expounding upon the staggering prices independent stations were paying for network sitcoms.⁴⁴ The demand for syndicated sitcom product was so high that production companies began mass-producing original sitcoms for first-run syndication like *Small Wonder* [first-run syndication, 1985-1989], and continued to produce cancelled network sitcoms like *Charles in Charge* and *Silver Spoons* for first-runs on the highest bidding independent stations.⁴⁵ Thus family sitcoms dominated U.S.

⁴⁴ "Embassy To Bid 'Who's The Boss?,'" *Variety*, Dec. 17, 1986, 39+; Morry Roth, "'Cosby' Pulls \$22-Mil In Chicago; Expected To Reap \$500-Mil Total," *Variety*, Nov. 19, 1986, 35+; "'Growing Pains' Draws 18 Deals," *Variety*, July 30, 1986, 41+; "Embassy TV Gets A \$1-Bil Chuckle From Its Sitcoms," *Variety*, Jan. 1, 1986, 29+; "'Spoons' & 'Facts' Boost Embassy's TV Sales Record," *Variety*, Nov. 20, 1985, 47; John Dempsey, "'Spoons' Serves Up Lotsa Silver To Embassy For Syndie Sales," *Variety*, Sept. 18, 1985, 45+; "Syndie Fever Hot For 'Webster' As Par Claims 1st-Round Records," *Variety*, Aug. 7, 1985, 42+; "Failed Sitcoms Out Of Mothballs To Help Feed Those Needy Indies," *Variety*, Jan. 23, 1985, 51+; John Dempsey, "Syndies Reviving Axed Sitcoms: Stations Try To Limit Runaway Prices," *Variety*, Dec. 12, 1984, 1+; "'Ties' Knots \$75-Mil," *Variety*, Sept. 19, 1984, 47; "Par TV Uncorks 'Family Ties' As High-Priced Cheers' Combo," *Variety*, Aug. 22, 1984, 85; "Syndie Loves Off-Net Sitcoms; Looks Like Embassy Got Things Rolling As 'Facts' Tops \$111-Mil," *Variety*, Jul. 4, 1984, 49+; John Dempsey, "TV Stations Going Bananas In Off-Net Program Bidding; 'Cheers' Chug-A-Lugs A Record," *Variety*, Jun. 27, 1984, 1+; "MCA Strikes It Rich: 'Gimme A Break' Could Hit \$100-Mil Mark; 'Knight Rider,' 'Simon,' 'A-Team' In Wings," *Variety*, Jun. 13, 1984, 41+.

⁴⁵ Dempsey, "Syndies Reviving Axed Sitcoms," 1+; John Dempsey, "Sitcoms & Courtrooms Live Up NATPE: Lotsa Wheeling & Dealing In New Orleans," *Variety*, Jan. 22, 1986, 33+; "MCA And Tribune To

television in the 1980s not only in primetime, but in the afternoons as well. Their omnipresence in the afterschool hours ensured that children of the 1980s would be well-acquainted with new family structures, including working mothers and sensitive, caring fathers.

The primacy of family sitcoms on independent stations as well as the networks provided both children and adults with models of family life quite different from those on offer during television's "golden age." Judith Stacey names programs like *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* as arbiters of nuclear family life, and suggests that families in the 1980s sought new ideals which more closely approximated their daily lives. She proclaims,

No longer is there a single culturally dominant family pattern to which the majority of Americans conform and most of the rest aspire. Instead, Americans today have crafted a multiplicity of family and household arrangements that we inhabit uneasily and reconstitute frequently in response to changing personal and occupational circumstances.⁴⁶

Families tuning in to 1980s family sitcoms saw "new" family formations that worked: mothers who had both fulfilling careers and happy home lives, husbands who did housework and cared for children, and even children who did regular chores that were much more rigorous than the old standard of taking out the trash. Not only were these

Resurrect 'Charles In Charge' For Syndie," *Variety*, Mar. 26, 1986, 48; John Lippman, "Sitcom Spurt Clogs Syndie Mart: Some 45 New Entries Reverse The Trend," *Variety*, May 21, 1986, 1+; "Embassy Adds 'Silver' Lining," *Variety*, May 28, 1986, 38; John Dempsey, "Fox TV Fare, Sitcoms In Spotlight At Indie Stations' L.A. Convention," *Variety*, Jan. 7, 1987, 39+.

⁴⁶ Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17.

programs attractive to networks and their advertisers as potential draws for upscale women viewers, but they also provided women viewers with fantasies of well-functioning households. In fact, Prakash's research suggested that career women actually watched very little television, and that the "plan-to-work" women watched the most prime-time programming. "Stay-at-home" women, he claimed, "may sometimes long to be in the working woman's shoes in order to achieve self-fulfillment, may envy the latter's wardrobe, stimulating life and independence."⁴⁷ Sitcoms featuring career women with families thus provided a range of women with pleasurable narratives about marriage, work, and family.

Family Sitcoms and Television History

The family sitcoms of the 1980s were produced by an anxious industry desperate to attract a demographic that had become difficult to understand. In putting *Family Ties*, *Growing Pains*, and *Silver Spoons* on the air, the networks sought to attract upscale women by promoting fantasies of the harmonious combination of work and family among the professional middle and upper class. At this crucial juncture when cable threatened to erode the network audience, and to fragment the audience further into niche markets, family sitcoms held tight to the ideal of the family audience, and offered its viewers templates for dealing with work and home arrangements that strayed from the ideals fostered by family sitcoms of the past. All three programs engage self-reflexively with their position in television history to varying degrees. While *Growing Pains* consistently makes references to contemporary and 1950s television, *Family Ties* references the career woman demographic, and *Silver Spoons* grapples with cable's

⁴⁷ Prakash, "Segmentation of Women's Market," 216.

threatening penetration rate. These moments of self-reflexivity point to both an attempt at more sophisticated comedy and to the general anxiety within the industry at the time about the future of network television and its audience.

Silver Spoons becomes a mouthpiece for network executives in “The X Team,” when Ricky and his friends are exposed to the evils of cable television.⁴⁸ Despite the inexplicable lock Edward has jerry-rigged on the cable boxes, Ricky and his friends manage to see “Naked Nurses from Outer Space.” Edward grounds Ricky for two weeks and revokes his television privileges for a month. However, he has the difficult task of explaining why pornography is coming across the airwaves into the Stratton home. When Ricky asks, “why do we get these movies on *our* TV?” Edward struggles to piece together his answer, as the studio audience knowingly chuckles:

well, well, it, it comes with the cable service...you see I ordered the cable service because I want to see...recent movies without commercials. And to my *surprise*...they—they also broadcast these...skin flicks. See, I, I have no choice! I want to watch a decent movie, then I, then I just have to order these sleazy movies at the same time. Are you buying this?

Edward’s awkward laughter and inability to explain why their cable service provides porn suggests that he himself indulges in naked nurses from time to time, a suggestion that seems obvious to the giddy studio audience. It also serves as a cautionary tale for viewers of broadcast television who might be considering making the leap to cable subscription. While curiously enough, Edward does not pledge to cancel his cable subscription, the

⁴⁸ “The X Team,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Apr. 30, 1983).

episode makes it clear that his elaborate system of keeping “adult content” away from twelve-year-old boys is not enough, and that perhaps families should stick to network broadcast family fare like *Silver Spoons* instead.

Family Ties proves to be self-conscious about network television’s target audience in the season two episode “This Year’s Model,” where Elyse is cast as a harried career woman in a commercial for Proper Penguin frozen foods, much to aspiring model Mallory’s dismay.⁴⁹ While casting agents appear uninterested in Mallory primarily because she lacks poise in front of the camera, her lack of commercial appeal also suggests that middle-aged, successful Elyse is more marketable to television audiences than a teenage girl. The commercial shoots in the Keaton kitchen, and features Elyse coming in wearing a business suit and carrying a briefcase, lamenting, “I was held up at work. Traffic was awful. How am I supposed to cook an impressive dinner for eight important friends in 20 minutes?” Her costuming and dialogue mark her as an upscale professional woman, while the product she pushes brings her more in line with working and middle-class women, emphasizing the aspirational nature of the career woman on television. Elyse’s modeling career is cut short, however, when she realizes Mallory’s jealousy and tells her “I’m a mother first and a Penguin lady second.” This resolution points to broader trends in 1980s sitcoms, which struggled to appeal to a fragmented female audience—Elyse needed to be a career woman to appeal to the ideal upscale working woman, but she also needed to remain relatable to non-working women.

⁴⁹ “This Year’s Model,” *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, Oct. 26, 1983).

Growing Pains gave a nod toward its place in television history in the first season episode, “The Seavers vs. The Cleavers.”⁵⁰ When daughter Carol brings home a letter from the Parents’ Association requesting chaperones for the school dance, Maggie and Jason volunteer. As Carol is decorating the gym, she overhears the president of the Parents’ Association, June Hinckley, bad mouthing her parents to the principal, Ward, in an extended allusion to *Leave It to Beaver*. Telling him, “Ward, I’m worried about the Seavers,” she says, “I don’t know, maybe it’s okay for a man to run a psychiatric practice out of the home, and maybe it’s all right for a woman to go back to work *just* when her children need her most, and maybe letting our offspring run wild is hunky dory. And maybe I’m just old-fashioned...” That evening, Jason sets the dinner table as Maggie comes home from work, and they receive a call from Mrs. Hinckley, who explains that the school no longer requires their chaperoning services. However, Carol lets them in on what she overheard: “she said I have a mother who abandoned me, a brother who’s a delinquent, a father who runs a mental ward at home, she made my life sound like a movie of the week!” Maggie and Jason are outraged, pay the Hinckleys a visit, and realize that Jimbo and June are from a different world, where their son is simultaneously coddled and strictly disciplined, and where all the furniture is covered with plastic slipcovers. Unable to reason with Mrs. Hinckley (or Mrs. Hitler, as Jason calls her), Maggie and Jason decide to attend the dance anyway. When the DJ plays “Land of a Thousand Dances,” and announces that he’s playing “fogey rock” so the chaperones would dance, The Hinckleys and Maggie and Jason undertake an impromptu dance-off, which unsurprisingly, Maggie and Jason win. Their victory serves as a narrative

⁵⁰ “The Seavers vs. The Cleavers,” *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Jan. 28 1986).

resolution for the episode—they have proved the Hinckleys (and thus the Cleavers) to be squares, and have come out on top as a new generation of parents. While this resolution is ridiculous, and hardly levels a satisfying comeuppance for the Hinckleys, it shows that *Growing Pains* is not preachy, and that it takes itself less seriously than both the 50s sitcoms it's referencing, and some of its contemporaries like *Family Ties*.

Growing Pains was often self-reflexive about its position on television in the 1980s and within television history. The season two episode “Jason’s Rib” opens with Mike watching a crime series titled “Undercover Mother,” which appears to be a sensationalized version of *Cagney and Lacey*.⁵¹ Carol takes the remote, saying “I wanna watch something good!” and turns on *Growing Pains*, and as she, Mike, and Ben sit down to watch, the opening theme starts. This comic device works to establish *Growing Pains* as a show that appeals to families, whereas “Undercover Mother” obviously (and perhaps paradoxically, considering that *Cagney and Lacey* was targeted toward older women, not teenage boys) had a narrow demographic. Indeed, *Growing Pains* landed in the top ten among teens 12-17, women 18-49 and 25-54, and in the top 15 among children 2-11.⁵² Jason demonstrates that *Growing Pains* appeals to men as well in the episode “Thank God It’s Friday.”⁵³ When Ben claims that Friday is the best night for television, Jason disagrees, arguing for Tuesday, the night *Growing Pains* (and *Who’s the Boss?*) aired on ABC. Regardless of their disagreement, the whole family (with the exception of Mike) enjoys TV dinners and watches television together that Friday night,

⁵¹ “Jason’s Rib,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Dec. 9, 1986).

⁵² Bob Knight, “Women Stir Comatose ABC-TV: Third-Place Network Perks Up With Improved Femme Demos,” *Variety*, June 18, 1986, 47+.

⁵³ “Thank God It’s Friday,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Feb. 10, 1987).

which on ABC was billed as a night of family comedies featuring *Webster* (1983-1987) and *Mr. Belvedere* (1985-1990).

In addition to its self-reflexive self-promotion, *Growing Pains* demonstrates the pedagogical potential of family sitcoms in general. In “Jason’s Rib,” the kids plot to resolve their parents’ argument through a trick Mike saw on *The Cosby Show*, by ordering Maggie flowers with a false card from Jason.⁵⁴ The Seavers’ enthusiasm for *The Cosby Show*, which Ben notes is “the number one show on TV,” becomes the narrative frame for an entire episode where the family (with the exception of Mike, who predictably has a date) goes to a taping.⁵⁵ Ben is shocked that Mike would rather go on a date, but he quickly understands when he becomes transfixed by a girl sitting near him and misses much of the show. Suddenly interested in girls, Ben attempts to seduce his babysitter. Though she initially refuses his advances, when she learns he attended a taping of *The Cosby Show*, she is so smitten that her older sister has to drag her out of the Seaver home. Reflecting on his sitcom-induced sexual awakening, Ben sighs, “everything was so simple before I went to *The Cosby Show*.” Television’s hit sitcom serves not only to keep the family together (the kids use its practical advice to resolve their parents’ argument and the family uses its taping as a family outing), it also sets the stage for rites of passage and provides Ben with the cultural capital he needs to avoid what was otherwise going to be painful romantic rejection.

Together, *Family Ties*, *Growing Pains*, and *Silver Spoons* present viewers with idealized visions of combining home and work—for Elyse, Jason, and Edward, work is in

⁵⁴ They could have easily gotten this trick from *Silver Spoons*, where Ricky uses it in “A Little Magic,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Dec. 4, 1982).

⁵⁵ “My Brother, Myself,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Feb. 24, 1987).

the home, thus there is little conflict, with no work-life to balance. In order to appeal to a broad female audience, Elyse, Maggie, and Kate are both career-oriented and nurturing mothers, with most of their screen time taking place in the home. The programs also represented a sensitive, domestic-oriented masculinity, a development that appears essential when women are working full-time. While the programs grapple with real, relatable problems encountered by dual-career couples, they also present fantasies of shared domestic work, mutual sacrifice, children happy to pitch in, and romantic partnership.

Family Ties

Elyse Keaton was first introduced to television audiences through a slideshow she and husband Steven show their kids of the two of them participating in the March on Washington.⁵⁶ The opening credits for the first season duplicate these images, combined with images of their wedding and children, dutifully reminding viewers of the Keatons' strong political convictions as they relate to their ideals of marriage and childrearing. The pilot episode establishes Elyse's dual roles as career woman and mother through *mise-en-scène*: the first scene following the credits opens with Elyse seated at her desk in the corner of the kitchen drawing up plans for an architecture project. Steven comes in and prepares breakfast while daughter Mallory enters and sets the table. When Elyse and the rest of the family sits down to eat, the remainder of the scene revolves around the kids fighting over the telephone, which hangs on the wall next to Elyse's desk—family members constantly appropriate her workspace. Her dual roles are further juxtaposed later in the episode, where one scene ends with Elyse making tea to serve after dinner,

⁵⁶ "Pilot," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Sept. 22, 1982).

and the next begins with her on the phone with her client who is unhappy with the plans she prepared for his house.

Family Ties consistently deals with Elyse's difficulties maintaining both her career and her family, and her desk in the kitchen is a constant reminder of this problem. The season one episode "Margin of Error" opens with the whole family seated at the dinner table, but Elyse immediately gets up and sits at her desk while the rest of the family sits and chats.⁵⁷ Steven clears the table as Elyse explains that she's having trouble designing a multi-faith chapel. As Steven and Alex argue over the stock market, Elyse is effectively kicked out of her workspace. After she and Steven leave the room, Alex uses the phone by her desk as the scene closes. The beginning of the next scene finds Alex seated at Elyse's desk once again on the phone. She comes in and rather than ask Alex to vacate her makeshift office, she explains to him that her confidence has been shaken. By the end of the episode, Elyse has successfully completed the chapel, and proudly shows off her plans to Steven and Mallory. These episodes never suggest that Elyse may be frustrated by the constant interruptions; instead she appears happy to share her workspace, as though it is all worth it for the sake of the time she gets to spend with her family. She can plan her work around her parenting and household duties, and she seems content with the arrangement.

Elyse takes it upon herself to mentor her housewife friend Suzanne, who complains that she has "no identity of [her] own," by offering her clerical work in the Keaton kitchen.⁵⁸ As Elyse marvels at Suzanne's lack of typing skills, one of her clients

⁵⁷ "Margin of Error," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Feb. 9, 1983).

⁵⁸ "Suzanne Takes You Down," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Mar. 16, 1983).

comes in and proposes multiple changes to Elyse's plans for his summer house. When Elyse defends her vision, Suzanne jumps in and sides with the client, proposing changes of her own that delight him and horrify Elyse. Suzanne gets so chummy with Elyse's client that she sits down with him and requests that Elyse make tea. As Elyse walks to the stove, the scene dissolves to Elyse working furiously in the living room two weeks later, surrounded by blueprints. She complains to Steven and the kids that Suzanne is sabotaging all of her work. Alex encourages her to fire Suzanne, arguing that she should not let their personal relationship interfere with business. Elyse agrees, but when Suzanne's husband leaves her, Elyse loses her nerve. In the next scene, Steven leaves to take the kids to school as Suzanne arrives for work. Suzanne tells Elyse that seeing the Keatons so happy has made her depressed. When Elyse attempts to comfort her, Suzanne responds, "no, now is not the time nor the place to discuss my personal problems," while she unpacks a desk lamp and a name plate that reads "Ms. Suzanne Davis" onto the kitchen table, thus establishing her new role as single career woman. When Elyse refers to Suzanne's workspace as her "table," Suzanne interrupts, "desk, Elyse. You said you'd call it a desk." Elyse once again asks if Suzanne wants to talk about her impending divorce, and Suzanne refuses, but quickly caves and complains, eliciting big laughs from the studio audience. Becoming increasingly agitated, Suzanne exclaims, "if one more person pussy-foots around me, and offers me comfort instead of respect, I'll scream, I just want to be treated like anybody else!" Of course, Elyse responds "you're fired!" This episode contrasts Elyse and her successful career, marriage, and family, with Suzanne, a sadsack former housewife and divorcee who has no work skills. Suzanne

married and bore children at a young age—early in the episode she tells Elyse that her kids are all in college and she’s 40—thus positioning her as exemplary of the failure of the traditional nuclear family.

The episode’s B-plot expands on this theme, as Steven complains that he is somehow always in charge of the neighborhood carpool, and the kids explain that several divorces are to blame. Here the Keatons, with their progressive marriage and household arrangement, are held up as the ideal intact family. Still, youngest daughter Jennifer admits, framed in medium close-up for added emphasis, that “it sure is hard to be a kid today. You never know when your family unit is gonna fall apart.” The camera cuts to a medium long shot to include Alex and Steven as Steven replies, “Jennifer, you don’t have to worry about that. This family unit isn’t going to fall apart.” When she asks him to promise, Steven glances at Elyse, offscreen, and the camera cuts to a medium close-up of her, her face expressing dismay at Jennifer’s concern. Steven replies, “we can’t promise, because nobody knows what the future is going to bring. But I can tell you we’ll do our best to keep that from happening.” Steven’s hedging keeps the Keaton marriage from seeming overly traditional, despite the fact that they are apparently one of the only intact nuclear families that their kids know. Thus the Keaton family does not alienate viewers whose families do not conform to the traditional nuclear family structure.

Still, the Keaton marriage does come up against many common problems experienced by families with two working parents. In the first season finale episode “Elyse D’Arc,” Elyse’s many commitments prevent her from celebrating Steven’s work

accomplishment with him.⁵⁹ Steven spends the first half of the episode attempting to accommodate her schedule, attempts that meet a dead end when he has cooked the two of them a celebratory dinner and she comes home too late to enjoy it. Even their attempts to make up are thwarted by both the weather and Elyse's women's group. At the end of the episode, Steven tells Elyse, "all of the things which have been taking up your time these past few days have been wonderful. Your career, spending time with the kids, helping distraught women. Even though part of me wants you around the house all the time, I love the fact that you're never here!" Though this line is met by an incredulous look from Elyse and is obviously intended to be comical, his meaning is clear: he respects her commitment to work and civic life outside the home. Elyse tells him that she appreciates that he lets her take him for granted, explaining, "I was brought up to think of a husband as the be all and end all of my existence, that a man should be the center of my life, and that I should learn to live in his shadow, and sublimate my ambitions to his, and wait on him hand and foot, and satisfy his every need, answer his every desire. You can see how ridiculous that is, can't you?" Steven's dreamy look is met by laughter, but Elyse continues, telling him that she knows she has to make more time for him. As they go up to bed, they debate what commitments Elyse might be able to give up—they agree that clean air and Planned Parenthood are too important to abandon, finally settling on "Pets without Partners," though as they turn out the lights, Steven admits that he hates "to think of all those lonely pets." The first season ends with only a temporary solution to what promises to be a long-term problem, yet it also provides comic relief for viewers struggling with the same problem, as many undoubtedly were.

⁵⁹ "Elyse D'Arc," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Apr. 11, 1983).

The second season finale works on similar themes, as Elyse lands a job at an architecture firm, and is thus no longer working out of her kitchen.⁶⁰ Two earlier episodes make reference to Elyse having “gone back to work,”⁶¹ suggesting that this episode may have been moved to the end of the season based on its compelling subject matter. Her first day on the job, Elyse is introduced to “the machines,” an intimidating computer system that she doesn’t know how to use. When she types a few words on the computer, paper shoots out rapid-fire. This chaos is mirrored at home, as the next scene finds Elyse desperately trying to finish plans for a health club that she has to pitch the next morning. Mallory has botched a dress she was trying to sew for Jennifer, and Jennifer begs Elyse to fix it, noting that Elyse has put it off all week. Elyse promises to do it later that night when she’s finished working. As Steven tries to coax the kids to let her work, Alex comes up to her and says, “Mom, I sympathize with what you’re going through. Today’s woman is in a very difficult position. Tradition, and certainly biology have put her in the home.” This statement is met with a glare from Elyse and laughter from the audience. Alex continues, “now there are these ridiculous new feminist pressures for her to do things outside of the home, like developing a career. Your anxiety’s natural mom, you can’t fool with mother nature.” Elyse responds to Alex’s overt sexism by exercising her maternal authority over him, telling him to go to bed, which he does. Steven encourages her to seek her boss’ help, noting that she’s overworked. Exhausted and exasperated, Elyse tells Steven that she could use help

⁶⁰ “Working at It,” *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, May 10, 1984).

⁶¹ “Not An Affair to Remember,” *Family Ties*, Second Season (NBC, Nov. 2, 1983); “Lady Sings the Blues,” *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, Feb. 23, 1984); “Diary of a Young Girl,” *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, May 3, 1984).

around the house too, as she manically straightens the living room. When he replies that he's happy to help, she exclaims, "that is exactly what I don't want!" She clarifies, "For the past two weeks, you've been doing more cooking than usual, you've been spending more time with the kids, you've been sweeter, kinder, more understanding than you have ever been in your life and I am sick of it!" After her nonsensical tirade, she storms out of the room, and the next scene finds her bombing her presentation, explaining to her client that she ran out of time because she had to make school lunches and sew Jennifer's dress. When she also has to admit that she doesn't know how to use the computer, she confesses, "I'm tired of pretending. Pretending that I know everything about architecture today, pretending that having a job and three kids is a piece of cake. The truth of the matter is, it's hard to design a building under this kind of pressure. It's hard using machines you've never even heard of before, and it is damn hard coming back to work after all these years." She runs out of the meeting, and the next scene finds Steven comforting her at home. Elyse's boss Karen pays her a visit and explains that everyone in the office has problems, and they all help each other. Elyse has managed to land in a woman-headed, non-competitive, supportive workplace, a fantasy ideal for any woman returning to work after many years away. The episode (and season) resolves when Elyse calls the rest of the family into the living room, proclaiming that she's "still a working woman." After Elyse apologizes for taking her frustration out on the family, Steven and the kids make their own concessions:

Steven: "If you're going to work, we've got to make some adjustments too."

Jennifer: "As a future working woman, I'm with you 100 percent."

Mallory: “That goes double for me...not the bit about working.”

Alex: “I think what we’re trying to say Mom is that we’re willing to help out more.”

Elyse: “Thank you.”

Alex: “So Mom, what’s for dinner?”—“What I mean is, what would you like us to make you for dinner?” [applause, credits]

This resolution is perhaps the epitome of a working mother’s fantasy, where children and husband all pitch in and everyone does their share of work around the house. While often these are empty promises, as studies in the 1980s suggested,⁶² the fact that the kids perform household duties in every episode, rarely with any complaint, makes this fantasy home all the more alluring.

Family Ties presents two opposing models of masculinity—husband and father Steven Keaton is the ideal domesticated dad, a product of liberal feminism and generalized “sixties activism,” while son Alex P. Keaton is a reactionary ultra conservative Reagan-supporter. Alex is held up as an Archie Bunker figure for the 1980s, consistently spouting off anti-feminist rhetoric. For example, in a season three episode, Alex tells his father “You know, they may say things have changed, but basically [women are] happiest when they’re barefoot and pregnant.”⁶³ While Alex’s digs against women’s rights garner huge laughs from the audience, *Family Ties* carefully cuts him down through his parents’ regular critiques of his politics. In an episode where

⁶² Nancy M. Rudd and Patrick C. McKenry, “Family Influences on the Job Satisfaction of Employed Mothers,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 10 (1986): 363-372; Rosemary J. Key and Margaret Mietus Sanik, “Children’s Contributions to Household Work in One- and Two-Parent Families,” in *Proceedings of the Southeastern Family Economics/Home Management Conference* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University, 1985): 48-51.

⁶³ “Love Thy Neighbor,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Oct. 11, 1984).

Alex dates an older woman, she tells Elyse and Steven that Alex is very mature, “it’s almost as if he’s a throwback to another era.” Steven replies, “turn of the century.”⁶⁴ Similarly, in an episode in which Alex becomes infatuated with a single pregnant woman, he tries to mask his shock at her situation by proclaiming that he is “a contemporary guy,” an obviously dubious claim met with audience laughter.⁶⁵ In the same episode, Alex himself endorses Steven’s version of masculinity. After Alex has let go of his dream of being a surrogate father, he explains to Steven and Elyse, “you know, Dad, this whole thing is your fault. If you weren’t such a great father, I wouldn’t have been in such a hurry to become one.” When Alex takes a job at Steven’s station, he expresses his concern to Mallory: “dad is a sensitive, caring man. I could pick up some bad habits from him.”⁶⁶ Many jokes revolve around Steven and Alex’s discomfort when they *do* agree on things. When both Steven and Alex disapprove of Mallory’s new boyfriend Nick, Steven says, “Alex, I take no comfort from the fact that we are on the same side in this.”⁶⁷ When Steven starts to doubt his decision to forbid Mallory from seeing Nick, Alex pleads, “Dad, I appeal to you, you have made a responsible and courageous decision. When I heard that you told Mallory that she couldn’t see Nick anymore, I said to myself, ‘what a dad!’ Dad, I have never in my entire life been prouder of you than I am in this moment.” Shaken, Steven turns to Mallory and says, “Mallory, let’s invite Nick to dinner.” Still, there are important moments when Steven and Alex’s differences begin to fade. In “The Real Thing (Part 2),” Alex realizes he loves his new girlfriend’s

⁶⁴ “Sweet Lorraine,” *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, Nov. 16, 1983).

⁶⁵ “Oh Donna,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Jan. 3, 1985).

⁶⁶ “Keaton ‘n Son,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Oct. 18, 1984).

⁶⁷ “Mr. Wrong,” *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Oct. 17, 1985).

roommate, Ellen.⁶⁸ He confesses to Elyse, and she replies, “it’s so beautiful to hear you express those feelings. And this is the first time I have really seen your dad in you.”

Alex pauses briefly, then replies in the affirmative. Importantly, there is no punchline where Alex denies his father’s influence. Instead, he walks over to the mirror, and Elyse helps him tie his tie, as he gazes at his reflection, as though he has come to some sort of epiphany about his masculinity.

Steven’s role as domesticated dad became more prominent in the third season, when Meredith Baxter Birney (who played Elyse) gave birth to twins in October 1984.⁶⁹ Steven was left to solve all familial dilemmas in several episodes in the first half of the season, as Elyse was out of town, on bed rest, or otherwise disposed.⁷⁰ His nurturing ability is on full display in the episode “Auntie Up,” where Mallory’s favorite aunt dies and Steven must console her. He admits that grief counseling is not his forte, telling Mallory, “funerals are usually your mother’s area,” explaining, “when you’ve been together as long as your mother and I have, you tend to divide the big emotional responsibilities. Your mother handles funerals, first dates, and plumbing. I handle colds and flus, open school nights, and office supplies.” He then fields Mallory’s questions about what happens after death. As Mallory begins to cry, the camera positions move closer, such that Mallory is framed in a tight medium close-up, and when Steven pulls her

⁶⁸ “The Real Thing (Part 2),” *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Oct. 3, 1985).

⁶⁹ Steven Dougherty, “For New Mom Meredith Baxter Birney There’s Nothing Like a Baby Boom to Strengthen *Family Ties*,” *People*, Feb. 4, 1985, 88-90.

⁷⁰ Meredith Baxter Birney doesn’t appear in the following episodes: “Love Thy Neighbor,” “Keaton ‘n Son,” “Hot Line Fever,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Nov. 1, 1984); “4 RMS OCN VU,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Nov. 8, 1984); “Help Wanted,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Dec. 6, 1984); “Karen II, Alex 0,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Dec. 13, 1984); “Auntie Up,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Jan. 10, 1985). She appears only minimally in “Best Man,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Nov. 15, 1984); “Don’t Kiss Me, I’m Only the Messenger,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Nov. 29, 1984); “Philadelphia Story,” *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Jan. 17, 1985).

into an embrace, the top of his head is cut off in medium close-up to emphasize the closeness of their emotional bond. The episode ends with Steven drying her tears and holding her close as he breathes a heavy sigh. The camera positions, along with Mallory and Steven's monochromatic black costuming underscore Steven's ability to take on Elyse's nurturing role, as his and Mallory's bodies blend together and all emphasis is placed on Mallory's distraught expression and Steven's sympathetic reaction to her.

When baby Andrew is born, Steven and Elyse clash on parenting techniques, with Steven once again taking on a nurturing role. In "Cry Baby" they argue over whether or not to let Andrew "cry it out" at night.⁷¹ Elyse admonishes Steven for picking up Andrew every time he cries, thus Steven has taken on the mother's typical role of dealing with overnight fussing. A few episodes later, Steven worries about Andrew with Mallory and Alex, telling them, "I should go out for the evening, forget we even had a baby, and relax, but I can't help feeling maternal. I'm a father!"⁷² Steven's role as a "new," nurturing, domesticated dad is explored and put in historical context in the two-part season three finale, "Remembrance of Things Past," where the family goes to help Steven's mother move out of her house following Steven's father's death.⁷³ While in Buffalo, Steven flashes back to his childhood with a gruff, emotionally distant father and a homemaker mother. When he questions his mother about her financial situation, she encapsulates her traditional marriage, telling him "we made an arrangement. He'd take care of all the business, and I'd make pies!" Obviously, this arrangement does her no

⁷¹ "Cry Baby," *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Feb. 7, 1985).

⁷² "Bringing Up Baby," *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Feb. 21, 1985).

⁷³ "Remembrance of Things Past (Part 1)," *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Mar. 28, 1985); "Remembrance of Things Past (Part 2)," *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Mar. 28, 1985).

good now that her husband is dead, thus leaving her two sons to deal with her finances. In addition to his father (and Alex),⁷⁴ Steven has another foil in his brother Robert, a fast-talking accountant who takes after his father. As soon as Steven describes his father to Elyse as a “very difficult man,” Robert comes in and asks if he’s talking about their father. He describes him as a “good man. Hard working, dependable. Salt of the earth. Like me!” Robert and Steven clash over whether or not to sell their mother’s house and move her into a retirement home with her friends, or to hold out for more money. When Steven privileges his mother’s happiness over money, Robert complains, “you haven’t changed, Steve, Mr. Emotional.” However, in the end, Steven’s emotional caretaking win out over Robert’s financial caretaking, as he agrees that their mother is lonely and should move near her friends. Robert’s masculinity proves to be outmoded—a throwback to the 1950s, while Steven’s masculinity presents a preferable, modern alternative.

The season four episode, “Nothing But a Man” displays Steven’s devotion to his family when he gives up his promotion to spend more time at home.⁷⁵ The B-plot underscores the necessity of Steven’s fathering, as Alex freaks out when his feminist girlfriend gives Andrew a doll and does everything he can to get it away from him.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, Alex manages Steven’s “appointments” with Mallory and Jennifer, telling them “time is money,” and that they don’t get to see him anytime they want anymore.

⁷⁴ Steven compares Alex to his father in “Pilot.”

⁷⁵ “Nothing But a Man,” *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Jan. 2, 1986).

⁷⁶ Alex’s influence over Andrew is a continuing problem, to the point where during the fifth season, a two-part clip show episode attempts to reeducate Andrew, detailing Alex’s problematic gender politics. “Battle of the Sexes (Part 1),” *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Feb. 19, 1987); “Battle of the Sexes (Part 2),” *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Feb. 19, 1987).

On a business trip in Washington, Steven's room service attendant's name is Andrew, and as he sits down to eat dinner alone in his hotel room, he pulls photos out of his wallet and sets them up facing him to create a makeshift family dinner. He returns home at 3:30 a.m., and tells Elyse that he's giving up his promotion: "I don't want this job now, Elyse, it's not the right time in my life. What I do want is to be home to tuck Andrew in at night, to help Mallory with her homework, to fall asleep in your lap reading the paper. Have you carry me up to bed." The episode ends with Steven proclaiming, "I don't want to be number one at work, I want to be number one right here." While on the one hand this could be understood to be Steven's assertion as "man of the house," in the context of the episode, it's clear that he means that he values achievement as a father over career achievement.⁷⁷ Though sacrificing career advancement for family was often cast in feminine terms (as in the controversial promotion of the "mommy track"⁷⁸), according to Judith Stacey, this move was not all that unusual: "There are data, for example, indicating that increasing numbers of men would sacrifice occupational gains in order to have more time with their families, just as there are data documenting actual increases in male involvement in child care."⁷⁹ Here Steven Keaton provides a model of more involved, domestically oriented fatherhood that privileges the wellbeing of others over professional gratification.

⁷⁷ Additionally, in a prior argument with Alex, he claimed: "I am the man, but I'm not number one, and neither is your mother. You can be the man without feeling you're superior to the woman." "The Graduate," *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, Mar. 15, 1984).

⁷⁸ Felice N. Schwartz, "Management Women and the New Facts of Life," *Harvard Business Review*, Jan.-Feb. 1989, 65-76; Susan Butruille, Eleanor Haller, Lynn Lannon, and Joan Sourenian, "Women in the Workplace," *Training & Development Journal*, Nov. 1989, 21-30.

⁷⁹ Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 34.

Outside of the specific plots of *Family Ties* episodes, Steven Keaton is a domestic dad by virtue of mise-en-scène. Many of the scenes take place in the kitchen where he is regularly cooking,⁸⁰ and in episodes where he is not cooking, he performs other chores like setting and clearing the table,⁸¹ doing dishes,⁸² cleaning,⁸³ and grocery shopping.⁸⁴ While quantitatively, Elyse still performs slightly more chores than Steven, he is very rarely in the kitchen and *not* performing some sort of housework. Steven's commitment to undertaking a good amount of domestic labor is not inconsequential in the 1980s, when dual career couples were struggling to organize their home lives. As a group of psychologists suggested in 1981, stress experienced by dual career couples "is compounded by the relative absence of cultural models and normative guidelines for resolving their special problems."⁸⁵ *Family Ties'* equitable division of household labor may have been a fantasy for many working couples, however, it still provided a ideal

⁸⁰ "Pilot," "The Fugitive Part 1," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Jan. 19, 1983); "I Gotta Be Ming," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Feb. 23, 1983); "Batter Up," *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, Nov. 30, 1983); "Lady Sings the Blues," "Fabric Smarts," *Family Ties*, Season Three (NBC, Oct. 25, 1984); "Don't Kiss Me, I'm Only the Messenger," "Designated Hitter," *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Oct. 24, 1985); "Mr. Right," *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Nov. 21, 1985); "You've Got a Friend," *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Dec. 19, 1985); "Teacher's Pet," *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Mar. 2, 1986); "My Buddy," *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, Mar. 6, 1986); "Be True to Your Preschool," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Sept. 25, 1986); "My Back Pages," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Oct. 16, 1986); "The Big Fix," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Nov. 17, 1986); "My Brother's Keeper," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Nov. 20, 1986); "Paper Lion," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Dec. 11, 1986); "My Mother, My Friend," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Dec. 18, 1986); "Keaton vs. Keaton," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Mar. 5, 1987); "The Freshman and the Senior," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Mar. 26, 1987); "The Visit," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, May 7, 1987).

⁸¹ "Death of a Grocer," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Dec. 1, 1982); "Sherry Baby," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Jan. 12, 1983); "The Fugitive Part 1," "Elyse D'Arc," "This Year's Model," "Working at It," "Fabric Smarts," "Oh Donna," "My Buddy," "My Brother's Keeper."

⁸² "Keaton 'n Son."

⁸³ "Speed Trap," *Family Ties*, Season Two (NBC, Nov. 9, 1983); "Once in Love with Elyse," *Family Ties*, Season Four (NBC, May 1, 1986); "The Graduate."

⁸⁴ "Big Brother is Watching," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, 17 Nov. 1982); "This Year's Model," "Mrs. Wrong (Part 1)," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Nov. 6, 1986); "High School Confidential," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Dec. 4, 1986); "Oh, Brother (Part 1)," *Family Ties*, Season Five (NBC, Jan. 8, 1987).

⁸⁵ Marolyn Parker, Steven Peltier, and Patricia Wolleat, "Understanding Dual Career Couples," *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 60 (Sept. 1981): 15.

model of a well-functioning, happy couple who worked hard to maintain both successful careers and a fulfilling home life.

Growing Pains

Growing Pains is far less overtly engaged in politics than *Family Ties*, despite its similar formula of a humorously amorous dual career couple with three children (increased to four after a few seasons), the eldest a son with teen idol potential. Indeed, the *Variety* reviewer noted, “‘*Growing Pains*’ is a harmless sitcom series that reminds one vaguely of ‘*Family Ties*,’ with a much milder flavor than the NBC-TV hit series.”⁸⁶

Although son Mike calls his father a “liberal humanist” in the pilot episode, neither the parents nor the kids readily engage in political discussion or action in the same way that the Keatons do. Still, it grapples with many of the same sort of home and work issues, with parents Maggie and Jason regularly struggling to balance their work commitments with their familial ones. Maggie struggles to let go of some of the control she once had over the house and the children, and Jason struggles to take on the role of primary disciplinarian and caretaker.

The first three episodes of *Growing Pains* clearly establish the premise of the show, with a voiceover introduction by Jason and Maggie Seaver. They explain:

Jason: “Hi, I’m Jason Seaver. I’m a psychiatrist, I’ve spent the last 15 years helping people with their problems.”

Maggie: “And I’m Maggie Seaver. I’ve spent the last 15 years helping our kids with problems even Jason wouldn’t believe.”

Jason: “Now Maggie has gone back to work as a reporter for the local newspaper.”

⁸⁶ Review of *Growing Pains*, *Variety*, Oct. 2, 1985, 123.

Maggie: “And Jason has moved his practice into the house so he can be there for the kids.”⁸⁷

The pilot episode begins with the family having breakfast. Maggie cooks and gives the kids their lunches, sending them off to school while Jason finishes paperwork before his first client arrives. Youngest child Ben sneaks back in once Maggie is there alone, and announces that his father didn't properly bandage his elbow. Upon inspection, Maggie correctly guesses that Jason failed to kiss it, and Ben complains, “it was all so clinical.” When Ben quietly asks why she had to go back to work, Maggie explains that she wanted to, and was bored staying home. She sits him on her lap as the camera slowly zooms in from medium long shot to medium close-up, and explains, “I worry about not being here for you, because well, you're the youngest. And I worry about not being here for Carol, because she's a girl and she needs her mother. And I worry about not being here for Mike to keep him from accidentally blowing something up. And *believe me*, I worry about leaving your father here to cope with all you monsters.” Ben gives her an out, telling her she shouldn't worry so much, and kissing her on the cheek. The camera zooms in slightly closer as they embrace and she rocks him back and forth. Despite Ben's soothing words, the rest of the episode proves that Maggie is right to worry, as Jason allows Mike to go to “The House of Sweat” with his friends, under the condition that if Mike is granted more freedom, he must assume more responsibility. Maggie is predictably furious, but Jason is even more incensed when his parenting strategy backfires and the police call to notify them that Mike has been arrested for driving

⁸⁷ “Pilot,” *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Sept. 24, 1985); “Springsteen,” *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 1, 1985); “Jealousy,” *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 8, 1985).

without a license and hitting a police car. When Maggie wants to ground him for a month, Jason ups it to two, suggesting that he has made the move from good cop to bad cop, and is settling into his new role as primary parent.

Maggie and Jason's work/home arrangement is threatened late in the first season, when Jason is offered his dream job, head of psychiatry at Long Island General Hospital.⁸⁸ He is disturbed at the beginning of the episode when Carol chooses to shadow Maggie rather than him for her career day project, telling him, "Dad, I need someone with a real job!" The morning routine showcases his domestic work, as he feeds Ben, takes Mike's temperature, and does laundry. As he fetches yeast to lend to a neighbor, his former boss shows up at his door, and proceeds to make fun of his home office and private practice, then offers to name Jason as his replacement. Jason explains that he cannot take the job because of his arrangement with Maggie. Meanwhile, Maggie gets in trouble at work when her editor finds out she failed to double check the name of the man she accused of bribery in her front-page story. The next scene finds Jason making a pros and cons list, with a close-up revealing nine pros, including "increase in salary," "dream come true," "springboard to publishing," and "prestige," and a single con, "Maggie," written in capital letters, around which he draws a heart. Maggie comes home and confesses to Jason that she is considering quitting her job. When she asks him what he thinks, he vaguely tells her that if she thinks she made a mistake going back to work, she should "do something about it." The next morning, Jason fears that Maggie has gone to quit, and races to her office. However, before he arrives, Maggie and her (female) boss have mended fences, and Maggie admonishes Jason for giving her bad

⁸⁸ "The Career Decision," *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, May 6, 1986).

advice.⁸⁹ Jason admits, “I liked the idea of you coming back and taking over the house, Maggie, I’ve been feeling trapped.” Maggie tells him she found his pros and cons list, and he says that when he made the list, “it came out clearly against” taking the job, that the one con is more important than any of the pros, and acknowledges that it is his turn to stay home. Jason’s willingness to stay home, sacrificing career advancement for his wife and family, particularly marks *Growing Pains* as a liberal feminist fantasy, where women and men sacrifice equally to combine full-time employment and family.

Yet Maggie’s transition to full-time work is perhaps most difficult for Jason to deal with, as she does not have nearly as much time to spend with him. In “Jealousy,” Maggie cannot come home to have lunch with Jason, so he goes to her office and meets Maggie’s coworker Fred, who joins them for lunch and sparks Jason’s jealousy. When Maggie repeatedly stays late at work, Jason comes up with an excuse to check up on her when Ben complains that Maggie is better at helping him with his science homework. Recognizing the real reason behind Jason’s visit, Maggie suggests that he’s going through the same thing she did for many years:

Maggie: “I spent 15 years in sweatpants cleaning toilets while you went to your office in your sexy psychiatrist sweater and your sexy psychiatrist jacket.”

Jason: “My jackets aren’t sexy, Maggie, they’re tweed!”

Maggie: “Women die for tweed and you know it.”

Jason: “I have no control over that!”

⁸⁹ While Maggie’s workplace isn’t as overtly gendered as Elyse’s on *Family Ties*, Maggie implicitly appreciates her female boss when she is courted for a more prestigious job by a powerful man who tries to seduce her in “Confidentially Yours,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, May 11, 1987).

Maggie: “And how many nights did I spend watching your broccoli go limp while I waited for you to come home?”

Jason: “I was fighting traffic, Maggie!”

Maggie: “Yeah, with that brilliant young psychiatrist in your carpool!”

Their argument resolves when Maggie explains that he will get used to waiting for her to come home, just as she did when she stayed at home. Yet clearly, this conflict is ongoing, as Maggie’s work schedule interferes with their anniversary plans in “The Anniversary That Never Was.”⁹⁰ Maggie first makes them late for their lunch reservation by frantically cleaning the kitchen, because, “the cleaning woman’s coming, I can’t let her see this mess!” Just as Jason coaxes her out of the kitchen, she gets a call from her editor who is sending her to Washington D.C. to conduct an interview. She promises to fly there and back in time for a romantic dinner that evening, but just as Jason is putting the finishing touches on their meal, she calls to tell him the interview was postponed and she must stay in Washington overnight. In a classic sitcom plot formula, Maggie decides to fly home anyway, and arrives just moments after Jason has left for the airport to fly to Washington. Luckily, Maggie is able to get on the same flight, and they celebrate their anniversary on the plane. Similar to the *Family Ties* episodes “Elyse D’Arc” and “Working at It,” Maggie and Jason do not find an easy resolution to what promises to be an ongoing problem, yet their temporary solution is romantic enough to provide satisfying closure to the episode, and to suggest to viewers that balancing two careers, marriage, and family can be done, even under extreme circumstances.

⁹⁰ “The Anniversary That Never Was,” *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Mar. 4, 1986).

Though Maggie clearly enjoys escaping the confines of domesticity, Jason's transition to primary caretaker of the children upsets her, to the point where she accuses him of excluding her from the kids' lives.⁹¹ Jason takes on the role of confidante for Carol, who is having boy problems, and he encourages her not to believe all the secondhand gossip that has gotten her down. When Maggie comes home and tries to talk to Carol, she confirms that Jason already took care of it. Jason also pledges to be Carol's shopping partner, a move Maggie resents when she tries to plan a mother-daughter trip into the city. Recognizing Maggie's dismay, Jason attempts to involve her in Carol's next crisis, however, Carol repeatedly goes back to Jason each time he tries to bring Maggie into the conversation. Carol sits on Jason's lap while he manages to rationalize the convoluted he said/she said story Carol is relaying, and as Carol calms down, Maggie slowly walks out of the room, looking defeated. When Jason tries to catch Maggie, Carol cries, "Dad, it's just not fair!" and the camera cuts to a medium close-up of Maggie, gazing back at them longingly. After he comforts Carol, Jason goes to talk to Maggie, who accuses him of "pampering the children," for instance, baking Ben's favorite cookies. Jason tells her that she wants him to be good at taking care of the kids, but not as good as she is. In a reversal of their conversation in "Jealousy," in this episode, Jason eases Maggie's jealousy of his new role in the home. He says, "I was at work when Ben took his first step. And when Carol spoke her first sentence. And when Mike committed his first illegal act. I missed out on all that. And now I have a chance to be closer to the kids, spend more time." She admits that she doesn't want to come home, rather, she wants "to have it all...but you can't." After she and Jason quickly make up, the last

⁹¹ "Superdad!," *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 29, 1985).

scene of the episode features the entire family watching a sitcom together. Thus the episode suggests that although working parents cannot truly “have it all,” they can bond and spend time as a family watching primetime television.

Familial sacrifices come up again when Carol has the opportunity to skip a grade in the second season.⁹² Jason expresses concern that Maggie has turned Carol into a manic over-achiever who values academic success at the expense of her social life. His theory is confirmed when Maggie talks to Carol about her ambitions and Carol reveals that she has no interest in getting married and/or having children, that she only wants a career:

Carol: “But for as long as I can remember you’ve told me to work hard, think about college and a career.”

Maggie: “Sure I did—“

Carol: “So what’s the point of doing that just to get married and give it up like you did?”

Maggie: “I haven’t given up anything!”

Carol: “Mom, you worked for *Newsweek* and quit to raise kids!”

Maggie: “Yes, but now I’ve gone back to work.”

Carol: “For a local newspaper.”

Carol’s diminution of Maggie’s career obviously hurts, as Maggie protests, touting the *Long Island Herald*’s circulation rate. Maggie tells Jason that Carol thinks she is “some kind of saint who gave up everything” for Jason and the kids. Jason asks, “does she know that’s the choice you made?” Maggie says Carol doesn’t believe it, so Jason comes

⁹² “Choices,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Jan. 13, 1987).

up with an idea to show Carol how Maggie felt about having children. While Carol studies, Jason brings out an audiotape recording of her birth. Carol listens to herself being born, with Maggie crying that it is “the happiest day of [her] life,” and Maggie and Jason creep into the room. As the tape ends, Maggie asks, “does that sound like a woman who regretted her choice?” Maggie tells Carol that she has “options,” that she can have a family, a career, either or both. In the next scene, Carol decides not to skip the grade, noting her “choices,” as though vicariously experiencing maternal joy has cured her of her intellectual ambitions.

Perhaps more disturbingly, the next episode finds Carol outperforming Jason in housework.⁹³ The episode begins with Carol cooking and Ben washing dishes while he laments to Mike, “Mom and Dad are sick and Carol’s mad with power.” Maggie is ecstatic with Carol’s housekeeping, telling Jason, “I haven’t seen the house this organized since I went back to—work.” She recognizes the potential sting of her words too late, however, as Jason replies, “Oh good, no, that’s, that’s very good, you tell a dying man he’s a bad housewife.” He continues to mope throughout the rest of the episode as Carol excels at running the house, saying in self-pity that his patients are probably cured. Once Maggie lets Carol know that Jason is upset, the episode resolves with Carol shirking her duties by letting Ben stay up past his bedtime and make a mess. When Jason has to take over, he exclaims, “suddenly I’m feeling much better!” Thus in two episodes, Carol first reduces her academic ambitions, and then gives up her managerial position in the home. The rest of the season finds her dating a football player⁹⁴ and seeking a nose job,⁹⁵ a

⁹³ “Higher Education,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Jan. 20, 1987).

⁹⁴ “Some Enchanted Evening,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Jan. 27, 1987).

paradoxical trajectory that suggests that she has both transformed into a more socially adept teenager, and that the “choices” that Maggie lauds have left her feeling more confused and lost than she was before. Carol’s paradoxical representation is a mark of sitcoms struggling to appeal to the amorphous women’s demographic. So as not to alienate non-working women, Carol’s initial adamant refusal to validate family life must be tempered through post-feminist choice rhetoric. At the same time, Carol’s ensuing obsession over her appearance, which came to an extratextual head during actress Tracey Gold’s well-publicized battle with anorexia, haunts her character, suggesting that in fact, Carol made the wrong “choice” in sublimating her academic and career ambitions.

Jason’s masculinity is the subject of several episodes. In “Be a Man,” he clashes with Maggie’s father, a police officer, who doesn’t respect Jason’s profession.⁹⁶ In “First Blood,” he clashes physically with Ben’s hockey coach, who has taught the kids to play dirty.⁹⁷ When Jason questions his coaching methods, the coach calls him a wimp, prompting Jason to explain that the coach has “sublimated anger” that he takes out on the kids. The coach retorts that Jason sounds “like one of them wussy shrinks,” and continues to egg him on until they get into a fistfight. Mike and Ben are incredibly impressed with Jason’s black eye, and Jason revels in his sons’ admiration, despite Maggie’s objections. When Ben comes home with a black eye the next day, explaining that he did what “Jason ‘The Animal’ Seaver would do,” Jason realizes he needs to reeducate his sons in masculinity. He and Ben return to hockey practice, and Jason takes

⁹⁵ “Jimmy Durante Died for Your Sins,” *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Mar. 3, 1987).

⁹⁶ “Be a Man,” *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Mar. 11, 1986).

⁹⁷ “First Blood,” *Growing Pains*, Season One (ABC, Jan. 14, 1986).

a punch to the stomach and walks away. The last scene finds Jason the new coach of the hockey team. He leads the boys in a cheer before the game:

Jason: "What are we gonna do?"

Kids: "Try hard!"

Jason: "How we gonna play?"

Kids: "In a sportsmanlike manner!"

Jason: "And what if we don't win?"

Kids: "You'll kill us!"

Jason: "How do I mean that?"

Kids: "Facetiously!"

The camera cuts to Maggie, who gives Jason the "a-ok" sign, ending the episode. Here Jason's non-violent, less competitive masculinity replaces the coach's homophobic, gruff and abusive masculinity, leaving Jason as the role model for the next generation.

In a season two episode, Jason advises Mike to be "sensitive" to Carol.⁹⁸ When Mike protests that "guys are supposed to be tough, not sensitive," Jason calls upon a history of more emotionally complex men on television, asking Mike to "explain Alan Alda."⁹⁹ Jason manages to speak Mike's language, suggesting that sensitivity attracts women, and referencing Maggie and Carol swooning while watching *Casablanca*. Though Mike remains unconvinced, his romantic storyline ends in disaster, and the episode resolves with Mike and Ben watching *Casablanca* for tips, suggesting that Jason

⁹⁸ "Long Day's Journey Into Night," *Growing Pains*, Season Two (ABC, Oct. 28, 1986).

⁹⁹ Alda also serves as a masculine ideal on *Family Ties*. When Jennifer has a falling out with a close male friend, Elyse extols his virtues, leading Jennifer to retort sarcastically, "he's not Alan Alda." "I Know Jennifer's Boyfriend," *Family Ties*, Season One (NBC, Oct. 6, 1982).

has successfully swayed not only budding womanizer Mike, but also his younger son into adopting a more “feminine” gender identity, an identity that is, importantly, adopted through modeling oneself after media images of men. By referencing not only Alda but a longer history of mediated masculinity, this episode not only teaches the Seaver boys to follow in their father’s footsteps; it simultaneously places Jason Seaver in the same line of men who can model a different form of masculinity for viewers.

Silver Spoons

Silver Spoons debuted in 1982, the same year and on the same network as *Family Ties*, with a similar premise of parent-child discord. However, on *Silver Spoons*, the conflict between father and son is not political, but rather on the level of maturity—twelve-year-old Ricky is mature beyond his years, and his father Edward is ridiculously juvenile. Ricky had never met his father, having lived with his mother until she remarried and enrolled him in military school. Edward is a spoiled, wealthy man who owns a toy company and plays videogames all day long in his toy-filled mansion. He was unaware that he had a son until Ricky showed up hoping to live with him. The series revolves around Ricky and Edward both learning to become sensitive, responsible men, as Ricky learns to loosen up a bit, and Edward learns to become a caring, responsible father. In the pilot episode, Edward’s lawyer Leonard accuses him of taking “no responsibility for [his] affairs,” while Edward ignores him and plays Pac-man.¹⁰⁰ Shortly thereafter, Ricky appears at the door dressed in his military uniform. The contrast between his costuming and Edward’s (casual clothes and a baseball cap), suggests that while Edward is irresponsible, Ricky is responsible beyond his years. At the end of the

¹⁰⁰ “Pilot,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Sept. 25, 1982).

pilot episode, when Edward goes to Ricky's school to bring him home, he tells Ricky, "I figured maybe I could help you be more of a kid, you could help me be less of one." As they leave for home, Edward replaces Ricky's military uniform hat with his own baseball cap, sealing their tradeoff. The program's theme song highlights this narrative thread:

Here we are, face to face
A couple of silver spoons
Hopin' to find, we're two of a kind
Making a go, making it grow
Together, we're gonna find our way
Together, taking the time each day
To learn all about those things you just can't buy
Two silver spoons together
You and I together (We're going to find our way)
You and I together (We're going to find our way)
You and I together.

Clearly, the "things you just can't buy" are the emotional lessons that the two will learn over the course of the program, as they "grow" "together."

Edward's career as head of a toy company makes him particularly well-suited to the role of domestic dad. Not only does Ricky get to participate in testing out new toys, but Edward conducts all of his business in their home. His lawyer, assistant, and business managers all come to him—in fact during the first season of *Silver Spoons*, Edward never leaves the house unless he is with Ricky. He is home everyday when Ricky comes home from school, as is Kate, Ricky's future stepmother, who also works in the Stratton home.¹⁰¹ While Kate's nominal position is Edward's personal assistant, she takes on a motherly role for Ricky from the very beginning, making him a sandwich in the pilot

¹⁰¹ Edward and Kate get married in "Marry Me, Marry Me: Part 2," *Silver Spoons*, Season Three (NBC, Feb. 10, 1985).

episode, and straightening his clothes in “A Little Magic.”¹⁰² Kate also plays the part of career woman. Though she turns down an executive-level job offer that Edward’s father extended with the intention to sabotage her romantic relationship with Edward,¹⁰³ it is quite obvious that she performs just as many executive duties within the toy company as Edward does, and eventually, she becomes president.¹⁰⁴ Throughout the series, Ricky, Edward, and Kate live in familial, economic, and career bliss. Their extreme wealth (the opening credits feature an exterior shot of their mansion) only adds to the fantasy of a dual-career stepfamily that manages to solve every argument with a hug, mutual understanding, and a healthy dose of tears.

The first lesson that Edward must learn is to discipline Ricky, which presents quite the challenge in the episode “Boys Will Be Boys.”¹⁰⁵ When Edward doesn’t have the nerve to punish Ricky, Ricky’s friend Derek tells him if his father doesn’t punish him, it means he doesn’t love him. Upset, Ricky continually acts out in the hopes of being punished and thus feeling secure in his father’s love. Finally, after Ricky drops a balloon filled with whipped cream on Leonard’s head, Edward realizes he has to punish him. Still, he is uncomfortable with the process, asking Ricky, “so, any thoughts on what I should do to you?” Clearly exasperated, Ricky replies, “Dad, it’s not up to me! I did the messing up and now I’m supposed to think of my punishment too? I can’t do everything, give me a break!” When Edward confesses that he feels bad punishing Ricky, Ricky begins to cry, and asks, framed in medium close-up, “why don’t you like me?” Edward

¹⁰² “A Little Magic.”

¹⁰³ “The Empire Strikes Out,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Feb. 26, 1983).

¹⁰⁴ “Who’s the Boss?,” *Silver Spoons*, Season Five (First-run syndication, Sept. 15, 1986).

¹⁰⁵ “Boys Will Be Boys,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Oct. 2, 1982).

sits him down and explains his aversion to discipline. Like Steven Keaton, Edward strives to depart from the strict paternal authority he experienced as a child. As the camera zooms in from long shot to a medium two-shot for maximum emotional effect, he tells Ricky that when he was a kid he brought his father some orange juice, but tripped and spilled it. The camera cuts to medium close-up as Edward relays the consequences of his mistake. He begins to choke up and tears are visible in Ricky's eyes as Edward recalls: "he called me a stupid, clumsy fool, and he sent me to my room, and I was never allowed in his study again." Midway through this sentence, the camera cuts to a tight close-up of Ricky wiping tears from his eyes. Ricky asks, "well, did you cry?" The camera cuts to a close-up of Edward, who pauses, then admits, "real hard." The episode ends as they exchange "I love you" and Edward tells Ricky he has to stay in his room for two days.

Silver Spoons sets up Edward's masculinity and fathering style in opposition to his father's, Edward Stratton II (notably played by John Houseman, who receives applause from the studio audience every time he enters a scene). In the episode "Grandfather Stratton," Ricky seeks out his grandfather, since Edward refuses to have anything to do with him.¹⁰⁶ Broadcast the week following "Boys Will Be Boys," this episode finds Ricky trying to facilitate reconciliation between his father and grandfather. He successfully woos Edward II to their home, and just as Ricky tells him that "[Edward's] got me now, and that's made him a dependable, responsible, mature man," Edward III enters the living room via his toy train. Ricky manages to mediate a business dispute between them, then tries to initiate friendly conversation. Though he is

¹⁰⁶ "Grandfather Stratton," *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Oct. 9, 1982).

unsuccessful in convincing them to tell each other that they love each other, he does manage to arrange a trip to a baseball game for the three of them. More progress is made in “Honor Thy Father,” where Edward II orders Edward III to deliver a speech commemorating Edward II at an awards banquet.¹⁰⁷ Though he initially refuses and leaves Ricky to take on the task, Edward III has a change of heart. After further detailing his painful childhood to Kate, showing her a Father’s Day card he made as a child that his father never received because he was on a business trip, Edward shows up at the banquet at the last minute, and gives his father the card. Following this symbolic moment of closure, Edward II admonishes him for being late, but then sincerely thanks him for coming. The episode ends with a father-son embrace, mirroring the majority of *Silver Spoons* episodes, which end with Ricky and Edward hugging. This emotional conclusion marks a new level of maturity for Edward III, who exhibits far less animosity toward his father in following episodes.¹⁰⁸

Much of Edward III’s sensitivity is displayed through his willingness to cry, a trait he encourages in Ricky as well.¹⁰⁹ When Ricky’s mother Evelyn challenges Edward for custody, Ricky and Edward’s emotional openness takes center stage, and the episode revels in close-ups of their tear-drenched faces.¹¹⁰ As Edward prepares for a court battle, Leonard details how the suit could turn nasty and ultimately hurt Ricky. Edward decides to sacrifice his parental rights in order to save Ricky any potential pain. As he tells Ricky

¹⁰⁷ “Honor Thy Father,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Nov. 20, 1982).

¹⁰⁸ For example, “Father Nature,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Nov. 27, 1982); “The Empire Strikes Out.”

¹⁰⁹ Ricky and/or Edward cry in “Pilot,” “Boys Will Be Boys,” “Evelyn Returns,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Oct. 30, 1982); “I’m Just Wild About Harry,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Nov. 13, 1982); “Three’s a Crowd,” *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Feb. 19, 1983).

¹¹⁰ “Evelyn Returns.”

that he has to live with his mother, the camera cuts between them in shot-reverse shot, each with tears in their eyes. Close-ups of Ricky reveal red eyes glistening with tears and tear-stained cheeks as he tells Edward how much he will miss him while sniffing. When he goes to pack Ricky's things, Edward asks if he can keep Ricky's *E.T.* shirt: "it's the one I cried on in the movie." As they say their goodbyes (Ricky makes Edward promise to "eat at least one green vegetable a day"), they both cry harder and sniffle more audibly, resulting in an extended embrace, with frequent cutaways to Evelyn, who looks increasingly touched. Their emotional display persuades her to allow Edward primary custody. Edward and Ricky's mutually caring relationship seems to have struck a chord with her as she tells them to "take care of each other" before she leaves.

Ricky tries to educate other men in the wonders of masculine sensitivity. In "Won't You Go Home, Bob Danish?," Kate's former suitor returns in an attempt to win her back.¹¹¹ Once Kate tells him to get lost, Bob tries to put on a brave face, but Ricky encourages him to express his emotions. Bob explains to Ricky that his father taught him that "real men don't cry," once again underscoring the generational differences, but Ricky counters that his father taught him that it is "okay for a man to cry," and that it makes a person feel better. Upon hearing this affirmation, Bob bursts into tears and clutches Ricky while he sobs. Ricky laughs nervously, but still strokes Bob's hair, kisses his head, and comforts him, offering him tissues. As he calms down, Bob admits that he feels better: "son of gun! My first cry!" The episode ends with Bob putting the used tissues into his scrapbook, suggesting that this is a moment of conversion. Ricky similarly deals a blow to tough masculinity in "Me and Mr. T." when he clashes with a

¹¹¹ "Won't You Go Home, Bob Danish?," *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Mar. 5. 1983).

school bully.¹¹² When Ricky comes home with a black eye, Edward panics and hires Mr. T. to serve as his bodyguard. Mr. T. terrifies not only Ox the bully, but the rest of Ricky's classmates and his teacher. Ricky is mortified, and desperately wants to stand up to Ox himself. While Edward refuses to listen to Ricky, Mr. T. steps in and suggests that he let Ricky handle the problem himself. Realizing he over-reacted, Edward apologizes to Ricky, telling him, "I'm kinda new at this father stuff, you know? I'm gonna make mistakes sometimes." They seal their agreement with the ever-present embrace, and the next day Ricky rallies his entire class to stand up to Ox and refuse to give him their lunch money. Despite Ox's attempt to appropriate Mr. T.'s masculine performance, the threat of the gang of his peers makes him back down, suggesting that Ricky's form of sensitive, communal masculinity wins out over the individual tough guy persona.

Family Ties, *Growing Pains*, and *Silver Spoons* narratively solved many of the problems working women faced in the 1980s. By presenting new men and new workplaces, they erased many of the conflicts with which women dealt. Elyse and Maggie both go back to work under female bosses who understand their situations, and Steven, Jason, and Edward are just as comfortable in domestic situations as they are at work. Recognizing the necessity of attracting professional women viewers, networks produced fantasies of domesticated dads who supported their wives' careers and took responsibility for the care of children and the home. The success of the programs translated into years of syndicated runs that presented domestic masculinity as a new ideal to a generation of children who watched the programs everyday after school, all the

¹¹²"Me and Mr. T.," *Silver Spoons*, Season One (NBC, Oct. 16, 1982).

while stirring anxieties about television serving as babysitter to unsupervised latchkey kids.

Chapter Three:

Solving the Day Care Crisis, One Episode at a Time: Family Sitcoms and Privatized Child Care in the 1980s

The need for day care in the 1980s, along with the Reagan Administration's refusal to do much about it, contributed to a media frenzy that proposed numerous solutions. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, mothers of preschool age children were the fastest growing segment of the labor force, and around 64 percent of mothers worked by the late 1980s.¹ According to *Fortune* magazine, more than one hundred day care-related bills were introduced in Congress in 1988, and none passed.² The Reagan Administration continued to cut childcare funding throughout the decade, often appealing to a desire to keep government out of private life.³ Instead, childcare took on an entrepreneurial cast, as day care centers became lucrative business operations, and as employment in childcare professions grew dramatically from the 1970s.⁴ While Reagan slashed childcare aid for low-income families, he simultaneously introduced tax incentives for employers to provide day care, and tax cuts for employees using employer-

¹ Cited in James Zampetti, "Building ABCs for an On-Site Childcare Center," *Management Review*, Mar. 1991, 54.

² Jaclyn Fierman, "Child Care: What Works—and Doesn't," *Fortune*, Nov. 21, 1988, 163.

³ Nadine Brozan, "The Toll of Losing Day Care is Studied," *New York Times*, June 17, 1982; "Child Care Grows as a Benefit," *Business Week*, Dec. 21, 1981, 60+; Fierman, "Nursery Rhyme, Day Care Reason," *New York Times*, July 29, 1982; Russell Watson, "What Price Day Care?," *Newsweek*, Sept. 10, 1984, 14+; "Who'll Mind America's Children?," *New York Times*, Mar. 29, 1984.

⁴ "The Day-Care Problem Won't Go Away," *New York Times*, Sept. 8, 1984; Georgia Dullea, "Ranks of American Nannies are Growing," *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1985; David Gumpert, "10 Hot Businesses to Start in the '90s," *Working Woman*, June 1991, 55-56; Jacqueline Shaheen, "Another College Will Offer a Course on How to Be a Nanny," *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1986; Darrel Patrick Wash and Liesel E. Brand, "Child Day Care Services: An Industry at a Crossroads," *Monthly Labor Review*, Dec. 1990, 17-24; Phillip H. Wiggins, "Child Day Care Profits Mount," *New York Times*, Mar. 3, 1987.

sponsored day care, a move “intended to facilitate parent choice and spur child care initiatives in the private sector.”⁵ Parents were duly encouraged to become conscientious day care consumers, armed with all the information that magazines, newspapers, experts, and the government doled out. Reacting to calls for federal regulations pertaining to day care centers, Jaclyn Fierman of *Fortune* writes, “Parents are far better advocates for their children than bureaucrats. So are community health and fire officials. Consumers should decide whether providers are trustworthy, stimulating, and, above all, nurturing.”⁶ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services equipped parents with the tools to discern appropriate day care, producing a pamphlet titled “A Parents’ Guide to Day Care,” which included a laundry list of things to check out before enrolling children:

The guide urges parents to make sure the facility has an up-to-date license, if one is required; a large enough staff for the number of children; enough space, indoors and out, so children can move freely and safely; enough equipment and toys, in good repair and suitable for the ages of the children; enough cots or cribs for naps; enough clean bathrooms; a safety plan for emergencies; an alternate exit in case of fire; fire extinguishers and smoke detectors, and strong screens or bars on windows above the first floor.⁷

On the one hand, the news media and popular magazines offered tips for parents (especially mothers) seeking day care, and implored corporations to offer some form of

⁵ Sonya Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 256.

⁶ Fierman, “Child Care,” 176.

⁷ “Tips on Finding Day Care,” *New York Times*, Sept. 3, 1984.

day care or childcare benefits to their employees. On the other hand, family sitcoms modeled private, in-home forms of childcare that could accommodate working parents. These television family formations supplanted their 1950s counterparts, often cited as exemplars of the “American family”: in 1987, *Fortune* magazine noted, “The typical American family, with dad at work and mom taking care of the kids, is mainly the stuff of Ozzie and Harriet reruns. Less than 33% of families follow the Nelson family model, vs. 48% 11 years ago.”⁸ A few months later, *Time* substantiated this view, albeit with slightly different statistics: “Beaver’s family, with Ward Cleaver off to work in his suit and June in her apron in the kitchen, is a vanishing breed. Less than a fifth of American families now fit that model, down from a third 15 years ago.”⁹ Televisual images of the family loomed large in the national day care debates, as the premises of many sitcoms revolved around non-nuclear family childcare arrangements.

Together, both nonfictional and fictional media operated as a governing strategy that instructed families of the 1980s to seek private solutions to their childcare needs. Michel Foucault saw government as “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed—the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. . . . To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.”¹⁰ Television sitcoms of this period, alongside newspapers and magazines, direct the childcare choices of parent-citizens. These media structure the possibilities for

⁸ Fern Schumer Chapman, “Executive Guilt: Who’s Taking Care of the Children? And How Will Kids Raised by Nannies and in Day Care Centers Turn Out?,” *Fortune*, Feb. 16, 1987, 30-37.

⁹ Claudia Wallis, “The Child-Care Dilemma: Millions of U.S. Families Face a Wrenching Question: Who’s Minding the Kids?,” *Time*, June 22, 1987: 54.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *The Essential Foucault*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 138.

childcare in such a way as to exclude the possibility of state intervention, guiding parents to make arrangements for the care of their children without any help from the state. Mainstream newspapers and magazines overwhelmingly advocated workplace-provided day care, with the rationale that working parents would be more productive if they did not have to worry about their children's welfare.¹¹ However, many articles also noted that parents considered live-in help to be preferable to day care centers.¹² These solutions are buttressed by a variety of expert opinions that keep the focus off of public sector intervention. Dana E. Friedman, senior research fellow of the Conference Board's Work & Family Information Center and author of numerous books and studies, offers her opinion in a multitude of magazine and newspaper articles.¹³ Friedman advocates

¹¹ Aaron Bernstein, "Business Starts Tailoring Itself to Suit Working Women," *Business Week*, Oct. 6, 1986, 50-54; "A Boost for Day Care," *New York Times* Dec. 19, 1981; Andree Brooks, "Fluid Work Hours Urged for Day Care," *New York Times*, June 9, 1984; Janice Castro, "Home is Where the Heart Is: Companies Try Harder to Meet the Personal Needs of Workers," *Time*, Oct. 3, 1988, 46-48+; Chapman, "Executive Guilt," 30-37; "Child Care Grows as a Benefit," *Business Week*, Dec. 21, 1981, 60+; Julie A. Cohen, "Keeping Kids at Work," *Management Review*, Jan. 1991, 26-28; "The Day-Care Problem Won't Go Away," *New York Times*, Sept. 8, 1984; Karen De Witt, "TV Stations Join Forces to Provide Day Care," *New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1980; Fierman, "Child Care," 163+; Susan B. Garland, "America's Child-Care Crisis: The First Tiny Steps Toward Solutions," *Business Week*, July 10, 1989, 64+; Marjorie Hunter, "Senate Day Care at Hand," *New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1983; "Job and Family: The Walls Come Down," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 16, 1980, 57-58; Stephen Koepp, "Make Room for Baby: Corporate Nannies Watch Youngsters for Parents on the Job," *Time*, Sept. 3, 1984, 61; Lynn Langway, "The Superwoman Squeeze," *Newsweek*, May 19, 1980, 72-74+; Charlotte Libov, "Day Care in Workplace to Be Tried in Stamford," *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 1986; Tessa Melvin, "Day-Care Options Explored," *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1984; "Pooling Day-Care Information," *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1984; "Providing Help and Referrals," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1987; Suzanne Schiffman, "Making It Easier to Be a Working Parent," *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1980; Leonard Silverman, "Corporate Childcare: Playpens in the Boardroom or Productivity Investment?," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, June 1, 1985, 503-506; "Some Fresh Approaches," *Management Review*, Mar. 1985, 8-9; "Who's Taking Care of the Kids?," *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1983; Zampetti, "Building ABCs," 54-55+.

¹² Geraldine Carro, "Who's Minding the Children?," *Ladies' Home Journal*, Jan. 1982, 69-70+; Chapman, "Executive Guilt, 30-37; Bradley Hitchings, "Today's Choices in Child Care," *Business Week*, Apr. 1, 1985, 104+; Langway, "The Superwoman Squeeze," 72-74+; Alfonso A. Narvaez, "The Housekeeper Outside the Law: Suburbanites Turn to Illegal Aliens," *New York Times*, Feb. 9, 1980; Wallis, "The Child-Care Dilemma," 54-60.

¹³ Friedman is cited or quoted in Andree Brooks, "Corporate Ambivalence on Day Care," *New York Times*, July 21, 1983; Hitchings, "Today's Choices," 104+; Koepp, "Make Room for Baby," 61; Melvin, "Day

corporate-sponsored day care for employees, aligning her with numerous corporate experts who cited loss of employee productivity in the absence of day care. For example, John P. Fernandez, manager of personnel services for AT&T, wrote *Child Care and Corporate Productivity*, in which he discovered “that 77% of women and 73% of men he surveyed take time away from work attending to their children—making phone calls, ducking out for a long lunch to go to a school play. That alone translates into hundreds of millions of dollars in lost output for U.S. corporations.”¹⁴ At the same time, child psychologists weighed in on the possible effects day care (usually figured in the separation of the child from her/his mother—fathers are absolved of any responsibility for the most part) would have on children. Edward Zigler, Yale University psychologist, vaguely suggested that children raised in day care might not be ready to take their appropriate place in society.¹⁵ Even so, Zigler’s solution is indebted to corporate logic, as he suggests elementary school buildings be used for day care, since “The schools in the United States represent a \$1 trillion investment, and we ought to be using them more efficiently.”¹⁶ Many child psychologists and government officials argue for family care, where children are cared for either by a parent or a member of extended family.¹⁷ Family sitcoms offered a variety of in-home childcare solutions, while ignoring the economic and logistical hurdles that made its models largely unattainable for the viewing public.

Care Options Explored,”; Irene Pave, “The Insurance Crisis that Could Cripple Day Care,” *Business Week*, June 17, 1985, 114+.

¹⁴ Chapman, “Executive Guilt,” 31; John P. Fernandez, *Child Care and Corporate Productivity: Resolving Family/Work Conflicts* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985).

¹⁵ Robert J. Trotter, “Project Day-Care,” *Psychology Today*, Dec. 1987, 32.

¹⁶ Qtd. in Nadine Brozan, “Mapping Future of Child Care,” *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1987.

¹⁷ T. Berry Brazelton, “What You Should Look for in Infant Day Care,” *Redbook*, Feb. 1982, 56; Connaught Marshner, “Is Day Care Good for Kids?,” *National Review*, May 19, 1989, 46; Claudia Wallis, “Is Day Care Bad for Babies? Hard Facts are Beginning to Clarify a Politicized Debate,” *Time*, June 22, 1987, 63; Russell Watson, “What Price Day Care?,” *Newsweek*, Sept. 10, 1984, 14+.

According to Foucault, the family is a primary instrument of government, thus in the 1980s the issue of childcare is of great importance to neoliberal governance.¹⁸ As

Wendy Brown notes,

neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’—the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions.¹⁹

By arranging childcare without depending on the state, the family models self-responsibility for its children. As Nikolas Rose shows, “Liberal strategies of government thus becomes dependent upon devices,” including the family, and I would argue, day care centers and various childcare providers, “that promise to create individuals who do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves.”²⁰ Under a neoliberal governing rationality, parents act as entrepreneurial subjects in their pursuit of employment (at the expense of providing their own unwaged childcare), while at the same time childcare itself is entrepreneurialized, as parents pay a wage to childcare providers and for-profit day care centers crop up across the U.S. Thus a family that pays a third party to care for its children maximizes its economic value, in eliminating the “psychical income” that Foucault points to as the product of a mother’s

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Essential Foucault*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 241.

¹⁹ Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 42.

²⁰ Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies,” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 48.

investment in her child according to American neoliberalism.²¹ Whereas in this model, the grown child produces income as a result of the mother's care, the family that pays a wage for this care is more efficient, as no labor goes without a wage. Here, the economic interests of the family line up with the economic interests of the entrepreneurial childcare provider. These mutually enforcing roles, the worker who must secure childcare, and the childcare provider who must secure children to care for, align with the neoliberal ideal of *homo oeconomicus*, or "someone who pursues his [*sic*] own interest, and whose interest is such that it converges spontaneously with the interest of others."²² This logic informs much of the popular discourse on childcare in the 1980s—on television, working-class Tony Micelli seeks upward mobility for his daughter, a goal that comes together with suburban professional Angela Bower's need for a housekeeper and childcare provider in *Who's the Boss?*. Similarly, a 1982 *New York Times* article detailed a day care co-op that served two needs: "to provide day care in a home setting for children of working parents shut out of other facilities by income ceilings or waiting lists, and to offer employment for qualified women who want to work at home."²³ These models maximize individual productivity without state intervention such as public day care centers.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, many family sitcoms provided private, familial solutions to the day care crisis that adhered to the same principles that the popular press advocated. *Mr. Belvedere* (ABC, 1985-1990) offered the ideal situation, where a British male housekeeper with glowing references (Churchill and the Royal Family) falls into the lap of a middle-class suburban family. *Kate & Allie* (CBS, 1984-1989) presents an idealized

²¹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 243-244.

²² *Ibid.*, 271.

²³ Nadine Brozan, "Day Care in a Family Setting," *New York Times*, May 3, 1982.

image of the day care co-op the *New York Times* described. Divorced mother of two Allie lives with her best friend, divorced mother of one Kate. Allie stays home, performing domestic duties and looking after the children while Kate works as a travel agent. This arrangement allows Allie to continue working as a homemaker, and allows Kate reliable, in-home childcare. *My Two Dads* (NBC, 1987-1990) exemplifies one private solution the popular press also offers: flexible work hours that accommodate childcare.²⁴ While one father works as a financial advisor, the other father works from home as an artist. In addition, the two men rely on an extended network to help them care for twelve-year-old Nicole, including the owner of the restaurant in their apartment building, and the judge who arranged their family configuration. *Full House* (ABC, 1987-1995) presents many conservatives' preferred model of childcare, with its elaborate extended network including widower Danny Tanner's brother-in-law Jesse and best friend Joey, and later Jesse's wife Becky. Many 1980s sitcoms featured men taking on more involved roles in parenting and housekeeping.²⁵ These more domestically oriented male characters suggest that in order for the family to remain an autonomous unit as the dual income family became the norm, masculinity must be reformed so as to include more involvement in domestic life. Popular press coverage of day care and the family sitcoms complement each other and work together under a neoliberal governing rationality that implores its parent-citizens to take care of their own childcare needs without asking the state for assistance. Rather than presenting a united front for how the

²⁴ Brooks, "Fluid Hours Urged for Day Care,"; Castro, "Home is Where," 46-48+; Chapman, "Executive Guilt," 30-37; "Women's Roles vs. Social Norms," *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1986.

²⁵ In addition to those studied here, see *Who's the Boss?* (ABC, 1984-1992), *Charles in Charge* (CBS, 1984-1985, first-run syndication 1987-1990), *Silver Spoons* (NBC, 1982-1986), and *Growing Pains* (ABC, 1985-1992).

crisis should be solved, these media oblige parent-citizens to choose between many circumscribed options. Parent-citizens are free to choose whatever childcare arrangement works best for them, so long as that arrangement does not involve the state.

The Luck of the “Domestic Agency”: Mr. Belvedere and Live-In Childcare

According to Dana Friedman, in 1985, “Most working parents today [that she studied were] looking for live-in help for children under age three.”²⁶ *Time* cites a woman who would prefer in-home care, because “‘That way there’s a sense of security and family.’ But she worries about the cost and reliability: ‘People will quit, go away for the summer, get sick’”²⁷ Indeed, turnover was of major concern to those seeking in-home or live-in childcare, especially as experts expounded the importance of consistency in caretakers.²⁸ *Mr. Belvedere* (along with *Charles in Charge* and *Who’s the Boss?*) provided fantasy solutions to the problems that live-in housekeepers posed. Mr. Belvedere remained faithful to the Owens family for the entire five season run, never leaving the family in the lurch, even when he was ill, and managing to return to their home (legally) shortly after being deported. While none of the Owens children are preschool age (the youngest, Wesley, is in elementary school), Mr. Belvedere gives vital advice and guidance to all of the children, beginning in the first episode.²⁹ The episode opens with the three children coming home from school, and, as typical “latchkey” children, fending for themselves until their parents arrive. Trouble brews from the

²⁶ Qtd. in Hitchings, “Today’s Choices,” 104.

²⁷ Wallis, “The Child Care Dilemma,” 54.

²⁸ Ellen Galinsky and Deborah Phillips, “The Day-Care Debate,” *Parents*, Nov. 1988, 112-115; Langway, “The Superwoman Squeeze,” 72-74+; Claudia Wallis, “Is Day Care Bad for Babies?,” 63; Russell Watson, “Five Steps to Good Day Care,” *Newsweek*, Sept. 10, 1984, 21.

²⁹ “Stranger in the Night,” *Mr. Belvedere*, Season One (ABC, Mar. 15, 1985).

opening shot, where teenage Heather tries to talk her way out of a boy's sexual advances over the phone. Wesley interrupts her conversation by reminding her that in the absence of their mother, she is supposed to start dinner. At this point teenage Kevin comes home and Heather asks him to put a casserole in the oven. Mother Marsha comes home from law school, and mentions to the obviously harried children that she knows they need outside help. Kevin supports her claim by presenting her with his report card, littered with D's. Fortuitously, the doorbell rings, yielding the help the Owens family so desperately needs in the form of a British housekeeper, Mr. Belvedere. Mr. Belvedere was ostensibly sent to the Owens residence by the "domestic agency" that Marsha had contacted.

Marsha and especially her husband, George, initially reject Mr. Belvedere for no apparent reason, other than perhaps his gender and his upper-crust sensibility. After Mr. Belvedere spends the night at the house, George explains to him over breakfast, "with the two of us gone so much, we need someone to do more than just cook and clean," and Marsha interjects, "I mean, we need someone who can relate to the kids." Mr. Belvedere gets up to leave, but then proves his worth, replying, "Oh, by the way, Kevin has changed his grades—downward. I'd ask him why. Heather doesn't want to go all the way—to Billy's house. And Wesley, I think Wesley would prefer a dog to this rather dusty, but durable creature," at which point Mr. Belvedere produces Wesley's lost hamster from his coat pocket and makes his exit. Wesley becomes the deciding vote, as he runs after Mr. Belvedere and whines "you can't leave!" This episode positions Mr. Belvedere as a safeguard against the potential evils of a latchkey childhood, figured in Kevin's scholarly

ineptitude (a recurring joke) and the threat to Heather's chastity. Heather appears to be headed down the same road as a girl profiled in a sensationalized *Psychology Today* story, a latchkey child gone wild: "Doug and Lisa's 13-year-old daughter, who goes home to an empty house after school, often smokes dope with her friends before her parents get home. She recently announced that she is pregnant."³⁰ Mr. Belvedere prevents Heather from getting into sexual trouble again in the second season, when her boyfriend Kyle pressures her for more intimacy.³¹ When the whole family leaves Heather alone in the house with Kyle, Mr. Belvedere intuitively stays behind to chaperone, then pretends to leave them alone. After Heather runs away from Kyle, and Kyle pursues her, Mr. Belvedere appears from upstairs and tells him "maybe the young lady isn't ready yet." Not only does Mr. Belvedere serve as a moralizing protector of Heather's chastity, but he also monitors Kevin's and George's sexual activities and polices their behavior. He reassures Kevin that he's still a man despite his failure to lose his virginity by his 18th birthday,³² and when George is tempted to cheat on Marsha with his high school crush, Mr. Belvedere places a framed family photograph on the bed to (successfully) dissuade him.³³

As an extension of his childcare duties, Mr. Belvedere is largely responsible for governing the family. As Foucault describes it,

Governing a household, a family, does not essentially mean safeguarding the family property; what it concerns is the individuals who compose the

³⁰ Trotter, "Project Day-Care," 32.

³¹ "Heather's Tutor," *Mr. Belvedere*, Season Two (ABC, Feb. 21, 1986).

³² "Kevin's Date," *Mr. Belvedere*, Season Three (ABC, Oct. 24, 1986).

³³ "Reunion," *Mr. Belvedere*, Season Three (ABC, Nov. 21, 1986).

family, their wealth and prosperity. It means reckoning with all the possible events that may intervene, such as births and deaths, and with all the things that can be done, such as possible alliances with other families; it is this general form of management that is characteristic of government.³⁴

While Mr. Belvedere's childcare tasks are not as rigorous as they would be if he were dealing with younger children, he governs the family through his insistent life lessons, which he details for the viewer at the conclusion of every episode with his journal entries. At the end of the episode "Heather's Tutor," Mr. Belvedere describes the problems he has solved from both the A (Heather and Kyle) and B (dispute with the neighbors) plots: "Heather and Kyle are dating again, but they have an understanding: Kyle decides where they go, and Heather decides how far. Meanwhile, I've finally ironed out the details of the Owens-Hufnagel peace accord. They have agreed to keep their Doberman on a leash when near our property, and we have agreed to do the same with Wesley." In these sequences, Mr. Belvedere sits at his desk with his journal, facing the camera and framed in medium shot. He reads his insights in voiceover as an internal monologue. When he finishes, he closes his journal and the screen fades to black, suggesting a resolution to the household's problems. Through this staging, Mr. Belvedere not only recounts the lessons he has taught the Owens family, the episodes position him such that he also teaches the viewer.

Mr. Belvedere governs the Owens family as though he were a member of it, fulfilling a day care fantasy where the childcare provider comes to care for the children as

³⁴ Foucault, "Governmentality," 235-236.

a parent would (a common theme among television childcare providers). The episode “Strike” from season two displays Mr. Belvedere’s devotion to the family, when he forgoes his salary when money becomes tight in the Owens household as George’s union goes on strike.³⁵ Mr. Belvedere suggests that he take on the role of a boarder, paying the Owenses what they regularly paid him. Mr. Belvedere begins to offer to “fix a meal or make a bed or two,” but George refuses, telling him that he is not to do any housework. When Wesley unknowingly sells Mr. Belvedere’s Fabergé egg at a garage sale, the family is shocked that Mr. Belvedere owns an item of such value, yet works as their housekeeper. George asks, “so why you [*sic*] stickin’ around here?” but his question is interrupted by Kevin, who comes in to tell George that he has returned the car George bought him before the strike. Moved, Mr. Belvedere says to Marsha, “there’s the reason I’m sticking around.” Mr. Belvedere not only sacrifices himself for the family, he also holds the family together, mitigating family disputes and dispensing advice to the children. The credit sequence exemplifies Mr. Belvedere’s position in the family, ending with a series of two still family portraits. In the first, George and Heather sit together on the left side of the couch, Kevin and Wesley sit together in the middle, and Marsha sits alone on the right side. Mr. Belvedere stands upright behind the couch. This image dissolves to another family portrait, this time with all of the Owenses sitting close together on the couch, with Mr. Belvedere leaning over them, with his arms around them. The dissolve between the two images produces the effect of Mr. Belvedere physically pushing the family together, at a time when many socioeconomic factors were pulling the nuclear family apart.

³⁵ “Strike,” *Mr. Belvedere*, Season Two (ABC, Nov. 15, 1985).

Mr. Belvedere produces a fantasy solution to the day care problem, and the perceived collapse of the nuclear family. While many families were looking for live-in help or aspired to be able to afford live-in help, the kind of caretaking *Mr. Belvedere* provides was not exactly easy to find or keep. In 1980, the *New York Times* featured an exposé of illegal aliens working as housekeepers for families who could not afford to hire a legal worker, or could not find a legal worker willing and able to meet their needs. One woman explains,

“The other solutions that exist for working women, such as day-care centers, are not adequate,” [Mrs. Snyder] said. “They are not for children who are in school. A housekeeper provides a stable, warm home environment for them.” When asked why she hired an undocumented alien, Mrs. Snyder replied: “I’ve tried all kinds of arrangements. I advertised. I interviewed. I talked to people. But there was simply no one willing to come and live in my house to provide the flexibility I needed and take care of the children.”³⁶

The pseudonymous Mrs. Snyder continues, “Housekeeping is the kind of job where there is no labor pool in the United States other than illegal aliens.”³⁷ *Mr. Belvedere*, though not an American citizen, is ostensibly a legal worker (through the first two seasons), as an agency provided him to the Owens family. He represents an ideal, cited by Claudia

³⁶ Narvaez, “The Housekeeper Outside the Law.”

³⁷ Qtd. in *Ibid.*

Wallis in *Time* magazine, that does not exist in the U.S. She writes, “most live-in sitters in the U.S., unlike the licensed nannies of Britain, have no formal training.”³⁸

Mr. Belvedere nods toward the reality of live-in domestic laborers during the third season, in a two-part episode wherein Mr. Belvedere is deported.³⁹ After Mr. Belvedere tells George and Marsha that Wesley cheated on a test, Wesley calls the Immigration and Naturalization Service to report him. INS shows up after Mr. Belvedere and Wesley have mended fences, however, Mr. Belvedere admits that he is not authorized to work in the United States. Unsurprisingly, the Owens house falls apart while Mr. Belvedere is in jail awaiting his hearing. They hire a replacement, an African American woman named Mrs. Lucas, but she lacks interest in the children and chain-smokes as she does chores. Kevin tries to talk to her about his girl problems, and she can only respond that they are having fish sticks for dinner. When Heather asks to bum a cigarette, Mrs. Lucas is quick to hand one over. Luckily, the Owenses have posted bail just in time for Mr. Belvedere to confiscate the cigarette. Mr. Belvedere confronts her, and she details her own family’s problems, suggesting that she has no time to deal with the Owens’ predicaments. The contrast between Mr. Belvedere and Mrs. Lucas is all the more pertinent when Mr. Belvedere goes before the judge and claims, “from the Immigration Code: an alien may be certified for employment if the job is deemed to require professional or unique abilities not possessed by any American.” Though the judge incredulously replies, “I don’t see where that’s relevant, after all you are *just* a housekeeper,” Wesley leaps to his defense, calling out “he’s not just a housekeeper! He’s special!” Wesley and Kevin

³⁸ Wallis, “The Child Care Dilemma,” 58.

³⁹ “Deportation: Part 1,” *Mr. Belvedere*, Season Three (ABC, Nov. 7, 1986); “Deportation: Part 2,” *Mr. Belvedere*, Season Three (ABC, Nov. 14, 1986).

proceed to detail Mr. Belvedere's "unique abilities"—he makes good French Toast, he fixes electronics, and he prevented Kevin from going on an alcohol-fueled bender. While the judge is sympathetic, telling Mr. Belvedere that "there is no doubt that you're performing a unique service, possibly even a public one," she still rules against him, and he is sent back to England. In his stead, the Owenses go through five housekeepers in rapid time, thanks to Wesley's chronic misbehavior, pointing to the fact that Mr. Belvedere's ability to rein Wesley in is one of his most vital "unique abilities." Wesley has scared off the newest housekeeper with a snake and is on the phone with the domestic agency to replace her when Mr. Belvedere magically (and, he claims, legally) appears at the front door. In his journal that night, Mr. Belvedere writes, "to be honest, without the Owenses, there hasn't been much to write about." The fact that Mr. Belvedere proclaims his delight in devoting his entire life to the Owenses marks the major difference between him and Mrs. Lucas, and presumably all the other housekeepers the Owenses have gone through. At the same time, he has somehow managed to secure a green card in record time to return to care for them. Mr. Belvedere, with his impressive celebrity references, predilection for fine cooking, and childcare skills, is a dream come true for the Owens family, and an unattainable dream for *Mr. Belvedere's* viewers.

Kate & Allie's Childcare Co-op

Even during the height of the daycare crisis, much of the work of childcare remained informal and unpaid. As *Fortune* magazine put it, "The day care industry attracts a panoply of providers. The majority are family members and neighbors, who

often babysit for free.”⁴⁰ Day care co-ops like the one profiled in the *New York Times*, which was organized by a local YMCA, supported calls for the government to stay out of childcare. *Forbes* lambasted the Act for Better Child Care Services, which proposed sliding-scale financial assistance for use in day care centers, arguing, “their bill would help drive out the relative-neighborhood-church approach; it favors creating a vast day-care bureaucracy, enormously increasing the cost of child care. The bill punishes families in which the mother stays at home by having their tax dollars subsidize working couples.”⁴¹ *Kate & Allie*, perhaps unwittingly, supports this point of view, as best friends and divorced mothers Kate and Allie live together and help raise each other’s children. Their co-op arrangement allows uptight, traditional domestic goddess Allie to continue homemaking and childrearing while being supported financially⁴² and provides career woman Kate with childcare and meals. Their parenting strengths complement each other—Kate relates well to Allie’s son, and deals with sensitive problems faced by both of their teenage daughters, while Allie excels as a disciplinarian and puts more emphasis on scholastic achievement. In many ways, Kate and Allie’s arrangement appears to be a conservative solution—as *Business Week* put it in 1986,

Fewer than one in 10 households now resemble the white-picket-fence world where father’s income lets mother stay home with the kids. Yet parents seeking child care must rely on the social policies and institutions

⁴⁰ Fierman, “Child Care,” 170.

⁴¹ *Forbes*, “Who Will Care,” 29.

⁴² When Kate asks Allie about her ideal career, Allie replies, “I’d like to be supported.” “The Family Business,” *Kate & Allie*, Season One (CBS, Apr. 23, 1984).

of a simpler era and on the workings of the market. All have failed to meet the need.⁴³

Kate and Allie's household maintains the basic breadwinner model as Kate supports Allie and her children (presumably along with alimony payment from Allie's ex-husband, although Kate and Allie regularly face financial difficulty), and provides them with a place to live. According to *Newsweek*, "some adults, not all of them old-fashioned, still maintain that child rearing should be a career—and that it belongs in the home."⁴⁴ Indeed, Kate and Allie have solved their childcare problems merely by combining their households into a pseudo-nuclear family that still maintains a traditional division of labor with Allie as the housewife.⁴⁵

Many episodes emphasize both the sameness and difference between Kate and Allie's family model and the traditional nuclear family. In "The Very Loud Family," the second episode of the series, Kate's daughter Emma decides to videotape the family for her school project on "our changing world," after Allie encourages Kate to push Emma toward a more difficult project than her already-completed dead-leaf display.⁴⁶ In an extended allusion to *An American Family*, Emma sets out to detail the day-to-day routines of her family, which she sees as representative of families dealing with divorce. She films Allie making dinner and her mother returning home from work and complaining about her boss, a typical representation of nuclear family life, albeit with Kate standing in for the breadwinner husband. When Emma's teacher selects her video

⁴³ Elizabeth Erlich, "Child Care: The Private Sector Can't Do It Alone," *Business Week*, Oct. 6, 1986, 52.

⁴⁴ Watson, "What Price Day Care," 14-15.

⁴⁵ Episodes frequently include jokes about Kate's inability to cook, and she very rarely does domestic work.

⁴⁶ "The Very Loud Family," *Kate & Allie*, Season One (CBS, Mar. 26, 1984).

to show on parents' night, Kate and Allie are horrified. The video turns out to be primarily a rehash of scenes Emma has shot earlier in the episode, however, the end of the video shows Emma's father calling Kate to cancel his plans with Emma. Kate reprimands him for letting Emma down, then tries to convince Emma to turn the camera off. Instead, Emma puts it down on the kitchen counter, and it captures her crying in her mother's arms. The video ends with the three kids sitting on the couch, with Kate and Allie leaning over behind them, similar to the posing of *Mr. Belvedere's* credit sequence. Emma directly addresses the camera: "as you can see, divorce really causes changes. But in our case, it's not going too bad. The end." The main change the video captures is Emma's deteriorating relationship with her father. The rest of the video portrays conventional family scenes such as family dinners and sibling rivalries, suggesting that in Kate and Allie's household, traditional family life remains intact.

Kate and Allie's household is again the subject of media attention in "High Anxiety," when Kate's television-producer friend Tom is inspired to produce a segment on changing families.⁴⁷ Kate and Allie unwittingly showcase their familial roles when Kate makes a disparaging remark about the "jocks" Emma and Jennie want to call instead of clearing the table:

Chip [to Kate]: "You're a jock!"

Kate: "Only part-time."

Chip [to Tom]: "On Saturday Kate's giving me a basketball lesson."

Kate [to Tom]: "Yeah, through the legs, behind the back, fingertip roll!"

Tom [looking impressed]: "Ooh!"

⁴⁷ "High Anxiety," *Kate & Allie*, Season Three (CBS, Feb. 17, 1986).

Allie: “To be followed by the famed Allie Lowell iodine and bandage roll.”

Tom [laughing]: “You guys are really something. You know, you’re just like a real family!”

Kate: “We are a real family.”

Tom: “Hmm, but not a typical one.”

However, Tom just witnessed what he seems to think of as the “typical” family—Kate takes on the father’s role of rough-housing with male children, while Allie takes on the nurturing role of tending to the child’s wounds. Tom gets an idea, telling Kate he wants to produce a program about “the new American family,” suggesting that there are probably divorced fathers who live in similar arrangements. He continues, “a show about the traditional family unit, and how people are trying to preserve it in new ways.” Here, he articulates the fact that Kate and Allie’s household is not all that new—instead, they are merely living out the nuclear family formation with a woman in the father’s position. On his show, Kate and Allie are joined by a pair of divorced dads and a man and woman who share a household in much the same way as Kate and Allie do. When the host asks why they have formed non-traditional family units, the woman answers, “for starters, simple economic necessity. I’m a housewife...but I can’t get paid for what I do best. Daryl can, he’s a lawyer. But he can’t run a household too, so why not pool our talents?” The housewife is in the exact same position as Allie, who holds a string of low-paying service jobs to earn extra income in addition to her unpaid labor in the home.⁴⁸ When the questions turn to Kate and Allie, the host inquires who takes out the garbage, an obvious nod to who takes on the masculine roles. Though Allie points at Kate, Kate protests that

⁴⁸ Allie works at a movie theater in “Allie on Strike,” *Kate & Allie*, Season Four (CBS, Apr. 6, 1987), and at a museum gift shop in “Kate Quits,” *Kate & Allie*, Season Four (CBS, May 4, 1987).

“in a family like ours, we don’t really have any sexual stereotypes, so we share the jobs, only Allie is a *much* better cook than I am. But we’re not locked into any roles.” Indeed, the long-running joke throughout *Kate & Allie* is Kate’s culinary ineptitude, but she also does very little housework and her childrearing is mainly limited to playing “cool mom” to the teenage girls and indulging in masculine pursuits like sports, physical fighting, and camping with Chip.

Still, Allie regularly seeks Kate’s advice on raising Jennie and Chip. When Allie finds out that Jennie is considering having sex with her boyfriend in “Jennie & Jason,” she immediately calls Kate and begs her to come home from work.⁴⁹ Instead, Kate advises Allie to “keep her cool” and talk to Jennie “woman-to-woman.” Allie has difficulty on both counts, and Jennie accuses her of treating her like a child. The scene’s blocking underscores Allie’s failure, as Allie sits across the room from Jennie, and they end up on opposite ends of the frame, with Jennie’s back framed in medium shot and Allie framed in long shot. When Kate comes home to reassure Allie, she tries again. This time she resolves to talk to Jennie woman-to-woman, and they sit together on Jennie’s bed, both framed in medium shot. As they talk, the camera cuts between close-ups of each of them, suggesting a much more successful and more emotionally connected conversation. Indeed, Kate’s advice works, as Allie convinces Jennie to seek birth control and she and Jason do not have sex. In addition to coaching Allie on the perils of raising teenage girls, Kate does much of the heavy lifting in terms of parenting Chip. She explains death to Chip when Allie cannot handle it, while Allie listens in learn Kate’s

⁴⁹ “Jennie & Jason,” *Kate & Allie*, Season Four (CBS, Nov. 3, 1986).

techniques.⁵⁰ Kate also manages to counsel Chip on his stepmother's pregnancy,⁵¹ and convinces him to confront a female bully.⁵²

In "Odd Boy Out," Kate must take on the father role for Chip, who got into a fight at school.⁵³ As Allie frets and makes an icepack, Kate scoffs that "all boys fight," and enthusiastically asks Chip the trademark Dad question, "hey sluggo, what'd the other guy look like?" When Chip runs upstairs, ashamed, Kate asks Allie if he knows how to fight. Allie replies, "I taught him everything I know. Not to walk down dark streets, not to talk to strangers, not to flash jewelry--" Kate interjects, "keep his purse close to his body?" Kate's mocking of Allie's failure to properly educate her son in masculine decorum leads Allie to begrudgingly admit that she needs her ex-husband Charles. Kate protests, "what do you need Charles for when you've got me?" When Jennie and Emma come home, they reveal that Chip gets picked on because the other kids perceive him as a sissy. Kate and Allie discuss whether or not their parenting of Chip is causing harm to his gender identity. Allie muses, "maybe Chip *is* turning into a sissy, maybe we *are* instilling feminine values and don't even know it." Kate counters, "that would be great, he'd growing up to be a nurturing, thoughtful human being!" Still, Allie convinces Charles to take Chip and some of his friends to a hockey game to increase Chip's macho quotient. When Chip returns triumphantly with hockey stick in hand, he announces that he wants to live with his father, which Allie explains is impossible due to Charles' work schedule. Charles further disappoints Chip when he cancels a camping trip he had planned for Chip

⁵⁰ "Dead Cat," *Kate & Allie*, Season Two (CBS, Mar. 11, 1985).

⁵¹ "Chip's Divorce," *Kate & Allie*, Season Three (CBS, Jan. 20, 1986).

⁵² "The Bully," *Kate & Allie*, Season Four (CBS, Oct. 6, 1986).

⁵³ "Odd Boy Out," *Kate & Allie*, Season One (CBS, Apr. 16, 1984).

and his friends. When Kate suggests that she and Allie take the boys camping, Allie protests that she is “not comfortable in the out of doors.” Kate retorts, “where *are* you comfortable?” and Allie reinforces her domestic identity, replying, “at home! In supermarkets, in department stores with wide aisles.” Though Allie agrees to go camping, bad weather thwarts their plans, and Kate and Allie host a camping-themed sleepover instead. Kate impresses the boys with burping contests and stories of bear attacks, inspiring one boy to tell Chip, “you’re really lucky, your mothers are even better than your dad.” When Allie is jealous of Chip’s admiration of Kate, Kate tells her, “mothers aren’t supposed to be fun. You cooked, you made each one of them brush their teeth, you fulfilled your function.” The episode concludes with Kate teaching Allie to burp, and Allie telling Kate, “you make a great father.” Kate, in other words is not merely the “other mother” that the *New York Times* profiles in its article about day care co-ops.⁵⁴ She is also the other father, and a hyper-involved one at that, who provides child care on a day-to-day basis, as opposed to Chip’s biological father who lives in another state and constantly lets him down. In this way, *Kate & Allie* presents an idealized model of co-parenting where best friends share child care duties and recreate the nuclear family.

However, life with Kate and Allie is not always quite so easy. In “Allie on Strike,” Allie has started a part-time job at a movie theater, and starts feeling the demands of a double shift when Kate and the kids constantly call her at work to request favors.⁵⁵ Fed up, Allie refuses to perform her household duties when she feels underappreciated.

⁵⁴ Brozan, “Day Care in a Family Setting.”

⁵⁵ “Allie on Strike,” *Kate & Allie*, Season Four (CBS, Apr. 6, 1987).

After a few days of pizza delivery and piled up dirty laundry, Kate decides to divvy up the chores. As the kids groan and Chip protests that he is just a kid, Kate delivers a motivational speech: “self-reliance is what made this country what it is today. Self-reliance is what tamed the rivers, cleared the forests, built skyscrapers!” Allie comes home and finds Emma and Jennie preparing dinner, Kate doing laundry, and Chip vacuuming and is convinced that they are attempting to guilt-trip her, but by the end of the episode, everyone is at their breaking points. Emma complains that Chip is “getting away with murder” because everyone else is too busy to keep track of him, and she micromanages Jennie’s cooking while Kate critiques Chip’s vacuuming. Just as each of them is individually about to strike, Allie bursts through the door and exclaims that she can’t take it anymore: “I don’t like just taking care of myself. I like taking care of this house. I just want to be thanked for it every once in awhile!” Thus Allie accepts, even desires her domestic care duties in addition to her paid work. As the *New York Times* suggested in 1987,

Women’s lives have changed in ways that require changes from men, from employers, from support services, from communities—all of which are very slow in coming. Women, it is said, must decide whether they want to change the world or have a bigger piece of the world as it is.⁵⁶

When the episode ends with Kate and Allie hashing out a contract, Kate clearly benefits—her only contractual obligation is to thank Allie when she does “favors,” which are defined as above and beyond regular domestic chores and childcare duties. Neither Kate nor Allie are “changing the world,” in fact, their childcare arrangement merely

⁵⁶ Geneva Overholser, “Working Women’s Unworkable World,” *New York Times*, Mar. 28, 1987.

mirrors that what David Blankenhorn, director of the Institute for American Values called the “1950s time warp” employers still lived in, where “They are rooted in the quaint assumption that employees have ‘someone at home’ to attend to family matters.”⁵⁷

“This Parenting Thing’s Like a Full-Time Job”: Flextime and Childcare Networks on *My Two Dads*

Alongside corporate day care centers, many corporate strategists also advocated flexible hours, or flextime. According to the *New York Times* in 1984, “Allowing employees a more fluid work schedule without jeopardizing career advancement may do more for child-care needs than the establishment of on-site care centers, according to a federally funded study on employer-supported day-care programs.”⁵⁸ Two years later, the *New York Times* cited a study by Suzanne M. Bianchi and Daphne Spain that argued, “If we want a productive labor force of female and male workers, but also value the family, work hours must be flexible, day care available and affordable and work within the home equitably divided.”⁵⁹ Janice Castro’s article in *Time* magazine details flextime as one of the many ways corporations are trying to meet their employees’ childcare needs. She tells of one father who chose to “follow the 7 a.m.-to-3:15 p.m. schedule that he had chosen under Transamerica’s flextime policy,”⁶⁰ and of employees at Du Pont’s corporate headquarters who “have trickled in between 7 and 9:30 a.m., chosen a half-hour or one-hour lunch, and left between 3:30 and 6 p.m.—as long as they have put in eight hours each day.”⁶¹ *My Two Dads* takes flextime to the extreme, with Joey working from

⁵⁷ Qtd. in Wallis, “The Child-Care Dilemma,” 58.

⁵⁸ Brooks, “Fluid Work Hours Urged,” 48.

⁵⁹ Qtd. in “Women’s Roles vs. Social Norms.”

⁶⁰ Castro, “Home is Where the Heart Is,” 48.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

home. Joey's work as an artist allows him to provide afterschool supervision for Nicole. At the same time, Joey's active dating life necessitates Joey and Michael securing childcare with the Judge, Klawicki, the restaurant manager below their loft, and various babysitters.

In the season one episode, "Whose Night Is It Anyway?" Joey and Michael argue over which one of them was scheduled to stay home with Nicole, as they both have dates.⁶² Thus along with their work schedule, the two have employed flextime with childcare during non-working hours. Neither Joey nor Michael feels comfortable leaving Nicole by herself, and the Judge is unavailable to sit with her. The Judge delivers a soliloquy supporting her hands-off approach to family governance, telling Joey and Michael, "much as I'd like to be of assistance, there comes a time when I must withdraw to the care of my own affairs and allow you two gentlemen to settle your own domestic conflicts. It's the only way you'll grow as parents." Here the Judge adheres to a neoliberal governing rationality, where, "Individuals are to become 'experts of themselves,' to adopt an educated and knowledgeable relation of self-care in respect to their bodies, their minds, their forms of conduct and that of the members of their own families."⁶³ Thus the Judge leaves Joey and Michael to master their identities as parents and to solve their conflict within the family unit. Nicole, for her part, points out that since she and her friends are of babysitting age themselves, perhaps she and her friend could simply babysit each other. Joey and Michael agree to this arrangement, on the condition that they have their dates in Klawicki's downstairs. When they return from

⁶² "Whose Night Is It Anyway?," *My Two Dads*, Season One (NBC, Nov. 1, 1987).

⁶³ Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," 59.

Klawicki's with their dates, they find Nicole hosting a slumber party with eight friends. As Joey and Michael's dates join in the slumber party girl-talk, Joey's date Madeline, a sexually adventurous botanist, tells the girls of her multiple conquests and teaches the girls how to be "sexy," at which point Michael throws her out of the loft. Madeline's conversation with the girls underscores the importance of appropriate childcare providers—Michael tells an angered Joey, "she was teaching Lolita classes"—and it suggests that Joey needs to be more responsible in what kind of women he brings home. Michael hammers home this message by telling the girls a variation on "Goldilocks and Three Bears," where now that they are "papa bears," their porridge must not be "too hot." Joey endorses this message, telling Michael in all sincerity, "that's probably one of the best stories you've ever told." This episode teaches lessons not only about responsible childcare—obviously, Nicole cannot be trusted to stay home alone, and the fathers cannot just depend on the state (in the form of the Judge)—but also about single parent dating etiquette.

Michael grows resentful of Joey's flextime in the season one episode "Quality Time."⁶⁴ The episode begins with Joey working on a sculpture as Nicole wakes up. Joey prepares breakfast for Nicole and has an in-depth conversation with her about her school gossip. Michael does not have time to partake in breakfast or conversation, as he rushes out the door to get to the office. He pauses in the doorway and looks back enviously at Nicole discussing wet willies with Joey. This image dissolves to an establishing shot of Manhattan office buildings accompanied by forlorn saxophone music. The establishing shot cuts to a medium shot of Michael behind his desk, brow furrowed, seemingly

⁶⁴ "Quality Time," *My Two Dads*, Season One (NBC, Dec. 6, 1987).

distracted by thoughts of Nicole as his boss talks to him about “the numbers.” As soon as his boss leaves the room, Michael calls Nicole to ask her about the gossip she was relaying to Joey: “How come I don’t know about Amy and Rebecca? And what’s a wet willie?” Michael makes a date with Nicole to go to a movie that night, only to have his plans thwarted when his boss returns demanding that he work into the night. When Michael explains that he has a “personal obligation,” his boss says he will just get “the new guy, Hungry Sid” to take on the work instead: “I like him. Know why? No family, no friends, no personal obligations. All he’s got is his unbelievable appetite to work his way up the ladder. He’d be only too glad to take on your work.” Michael’s boss’ manipulation is in line with the corporate culture that flextime was designed to work against—allowing parents to adapt their schedules to accommodate childcare. By the end of the episode, Michael convinces his boss to allow him more flexibility in his schedule so that he can spend more time with Nicole. This conciliation inspires Michael’s boss to go home and spend time with his own children, a gesture that concludes the episode and signals a desirable shift in corporate culture.

Yet Michael’s work continues to be a source of narrative conflict throughout the series, and Joey continues to flaunt his parental privilege, telling Michael in the second season premiere, “I know what our daughter likes, okay? I’m the one who works at home, remember? I know where she goes, I know what she does, I know who she hangs out with.”⁶⁵ A second season episode opens with Michael in his office saying goodnight to Nicole over the phone.⁶⁶ Despite the long hours he has put in, his boss enters his

⁶⁵ “Blast From the Past,” *My Two Dads*, Season Two (NBC, Jan. 11, 1989).

⁶⁶ “The Man in the Pink Slip,” *My Two Dads*, Season Two (NBC, Feb. 8, 1989).

office and he finds out that his boss is selling the company and that he is being replaced. Luckily, by the end of the episode, Michael's boss hires him to start a magazine as a tax shelter, and hires Joey to do design. This new work arrangement provides Michael with even more flexibility, though it does involve Joey spending some work hours in an office. At the same time, subsequent episodes feature Michael working in his new home office, conveniently tucked into the alcove below Nicole's bedroom, allowing for maximum parental supervision.⁶⁷ When Michael shows Joey their new office space, he is miffed to discover their boss has hired a magazine editor who will reside in the nice office he thought was for him.⁶⁸ Instead, Michael and Joey share an open office space, with desks positioned only a foot apart and facing each other, allowing them to co-parent Nicole when she visits after school.⁶⁹

As Nicole gets older, Michael and Joey's care strategies become more complex, as does the Judge's hands-off approach. When Joey and Michael catch Nicole coming home drunk during the second season, they confiscate her drunk driver's car keys and have a talk with her, which she clearly brushes off.⁷⁰ As they lament their failure, the Judge tells them that "words don't work," prompting Michael and Joey to hatch a scheme to get excessively drunk in front of Nicole to teach her the evils of alcohol. The Judge appears to serve as supervisor, asking them to "sign in" with every shot of whiskey they take, and explaining their rapidly deteriorating behavior to an increasingly concerned Nicole. When Nicole pleads for them to stop, the Judge denies her request, instead

⁶⁷ "Story with a Twist," *My Two Dads*, Season Two (NBC, Feb. 22, 1989) and "Playing with Fire," *My Two Dads*, Season Two (NBC, Mar. 1, 1989).

⁶⁸ "Together We Stand," *My Two Dads*, Season Two (NBC, Mar. 29, 1989).

⁶⁹ "Getting Smart," *My Two Dads*, Season Two (NBC, Jul. 29, 1989).

⁷⁰ "Story with a Twist."

turning on a car-racing videogame to further prove their point. As Joey and Michael pick up their joysticks, the camera cuts to full-screen shot of the videogame, thus also teaching the viewer the consequences of drunk driving as each of them quickly crashes and their vehicles burst into flames. As Michael suggests that they all “get out and push,” Nicole’s driver from her drunken evening returns seeking his keys. Joey and Michael gleefully remember that they have access to a real car, and prepare to leave the apartment. The Judge jumps up and exclaims, “party’s over boys!” but Joey pushes her aside on his way out the door. She and Nicole chase after Joey and Michael, who are quickly apprehended by Klawicki in the hallway. Nicole tearfully thanks him after the Judge admits that his action was not part of the plan. Nicole then angrily turns to the Judge, telling her “you should never have let them do this!” The Judge insists upon her lack of involvement, replying, “they were going to do what they were gonna do no mater what I said. Just the way you are, no matter what they say.” As slow, mournful piano music comes on the soundtrack, Nicole sits on the couch with her passed out fathers. The Judge pauses to gently touch Joey and Michael’s heads, and exits the frame as the episode concludes, leaving the family to deal with the ramifications of the evening’s lesson on their own.

My Two Dads solves childcare problems on a micro-level. Joey works primarily from home, Michael utilizes flextime, they depend on neighborhood friends for help from time to time, including the Judge, who becomes a maternal figure for Nicole. However, the Judge always avoids getting too involved in family disputes, encouraging Joey and Michael to make their own parenting decisions, and thus to “grow as parents.” Here the Judge, as representative of the State, adheres to a neoliberal governing rationality, where

“By stressing ‘self-care,’ the neoliberal state divulges paternalistic responsibility for its subjects but simultaneously holds its subjects responsible for self-government.”⁷¹ In this way, *My Two Dads* encourages an ethic of self-responsibility to oneself and one’s family. In an episode where a newspaper challenges the Judge’s decision to award custody of Nicole to Joey and Michael, a television newsmagazine program seeks the advice of Dr. Joyce Brothers, who concurs with the Judge’s approach to governing the family from a distance.⁷² Responding to accusations that Joey and Michael are too inexperienced to be proper parents, Dr. Brothers suggests that the problems they might face are not life-or-death situations, that if “she breaks a leg, they take her to the doctor,” thus social services need not intervene. The newsmagazine also interviews New York City Mayor Edward Koch, who concurs that the family arrangement should be left intact, that the state should not intervene any further. *My Two Dads* solves all parenting and childcare problems within the family, never relying on the Judge or any other authority for more than a few pearls of wisdom here and there. And even those pearls of wisdom only encourage self-reliance.

“I Wanted to Make Sure You had a Babysitter. Need One?”: Full House and the Extended Family Network

Many who denied the need for day care in the 1980s cited the existence of and parental preference for extended family, friend, and neighborhood childcare networks. Ignoring the family migration that became commonplace in the 1950s, many who opposed funding for day care suggested that parents in need of childcare could turn

⁷¹ Majia Holmer Nadesan, *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 33.

⁷² “The Family in Question,” *My Two Dads*, Season One (NBC, May 9, 1988).

toward their relatives. However, as *Business Week* noted in 1981, “Women workers are finding that the old family-support networks of relatives and neighbors are dissolving as families move and even middle-aged women enter the work force.”⁷³ Jo Ann Gasper, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “scoffed at the notion of a day-care shortage in the United States. She insisted that the growth of ‘informal’ arrangements involving help from ‘a relative or a friend’ was providing an adequate supply of day care for children.”⁷⁴ According to *Forbes* magazine, in an article positioning itself against governmental intervention into day care, “Most parents prefer to leave their youngsters with relatives, neighborhood baby-sitters or with day-care services provided by local churches or synagogues.”⁷⁵ *Full House* creates this “preferred,” yet elusive family network model, when widower Danny Tanner acquires the live-in (and ostensibly free) childcare services of his brother-in-law Jesse and his best friend Joey. With this arrangement, Danny’s three daughters get constant and consistent care. The preexisting familial bonds linking Jesse to his nieces ensures his lasting dedication to the family, so much so, that when Jesse gets married and has children of his own, he and his family remain in the Tanner house, living in a renovated attic space.⁷⁶ When Jesse considers moving out during the first season, a fantasized montage of images of him caring for baby Michelle draws him back home, and she rewards his loyalty by calling him “dad.”⁷⁷ At the beginning of the series, both Jesse and Joey have part-time or

⁷³ “Child Care Grows as a Benefit,” 60.

⁷⁴ Watson, “What Price Day Care?,” 20.

⁷⁵ *Forbes*, “Who Will Care,” 29.

⁷⁶ “Fuller House,” *Full House*, Season Four (ABC, Feb. 22, 1991). This episode, following the two-part episode where Jesse and Becky get married, deals with Michelle guilt-tripping them to remain in the house, which they do for the rest of the series, even after having twins of their own.

⁷⁷ “The Seven-Month Itch Part 2,” *Full House*, Season One (ABC, Mar. 18, 1988).

unstable jobs (Jesse as a part-time exterminator and aspiring rock star, Joey as a struggling stand-up comedian), allowing them to work their schedules around caring for the girls, and making them grateful for the room and board Danny provides.

Joey and Jesse begin working together writing commercial jingles at home during the second season.⁷⁸ At the beginning of the episode “Working Mothers,” Joey and Jesse try to squeeze in some work before the girls come home from school—Joey notes that “at the stroke of three we turn back into housewives.”⁷⁹ Though they have been selling jingles freelance, an advertising agency expresses interest in hiring them full-time, resulting in middle child Stephanie asking oldest daughter DJ, “if Uncle Jesse, Joey, and Daddy are all working, who’s gonna take care of us?” DJ can only shrug at the question, and the scene ominously fades to black. The next scene underscores this tension, beginning with an exterior aerial shot of downtown office buildings, and cutting to Jesse and Joey preparing for their presentation at the agency. Jesse says to Joey, “any moment, our future’s gonna come walking right through that door.” A sound bridge of Michelle’s voice complicates their notions of their future, and the camera cuts to a medium shot of her walking into the office, her entrance serving to embody the day care crisis. Jesse’s mother follows Michelle into the office, explaining that she has to go to work herself, and is dropping Michelle off as they had planned. Despite the fact that the client is running late, Jesse’s mother cannot watch Michelle any longer. Joey and Jesse bribe Michelle to hide under the desk with a cookie and a promise of playing hide-and-seek, but of course she trots out mid-way through their presentation. Still, they manage to land full-time

⁷⁸ “Jingle Hell,” *Full House*, Season Two (ABC, Nov. 11, 1988).

⁷⁹ “Working Mothers,” *Full House*, Season Two (ABC, Feb. 3, 1989).

positions. As they celebrate, Danny comes home with DJ, who just became a green belt in karate, and Stephanie, who won her talent show. When Jesse and Joey share their news, DJ and Stephanie appear crestfallen, and forlorn music enters the soundtrack. Stephanie lays on a guilt-trip, suggesting that they will “miss the whole rest of our lives.” As they all hug, the scene dissolves to Jesse and Joey making a pros and cons list for accepting full-time employment, and Jesse admits that he “dig[s] being Mr. Mom.”⁸⁰ The next day, they ask their boss if they can work from home, and he agrees, thus allowing Joey and Jesse to continue being “Mr. Moms” while remaining gainfully employed. Upon learning the good news, Stephanie turns to Danny and asks if he can work from home, too. Danny acknowledges the reality, telling her, “unfortunatly, most parents’ jobs aren’t that flexible.” Yet all three men hold jobs that are flexible enough to allow them to arrange for consistent childcare.

When Joey goes on the road for a 16-day comedy tour, Jesse takes two weeks off from work to cover for him at home.⁸¹ When Joey and Jesse leave town to shoot a commercial, Danny manages to play “superdad,” albeit with a few hitches.⁸² The biggest dilemma he faces is a conflict of afterschool activities—Stephanie’s science fair and DJ’s drama festival fall on the same day. To make matters worse, he accidentally cooks Stephanie’s science project as part of dinner, mistaking it as a pre-prepared dish left by Joey. He stays up all night re-doing her project, and vows to leave the science fair in time to make it to the second act of DJ’s play. However, he is so exhausted that upon

⁸⁰ Jesse maintains this role when his wife goes back to work following the birth of their twins in “Play it Again, Jesse,” *Full House*, Season Five (ABC, Jan. 7, 1992).

⁸¹ “Joey’s Place,” *Full House*, Season One (ABC, Dec. 4, 1987).

⁸² “Danny in Charge,” *Full House*, Season Four (ABC, Dec. 14, 1990).

coming home from work, he takes a nap with Michelle and misses both functions. The girls come home worried about him, and when they wake him up, he apologizes profusely, telling them, “I am so sorry, I wanted to be there so badly, I let you both down. You know, this single parent stuff is not as easy as I thought it would be.” DJ and Stephanie apologize for putting pressure on him to attend their events, and when Danny says he’ll start making dinner, DJ protests sincerely, “Dad, wait. You do so much for us. Let us cook dinner for you.” Stephanie agrees, and they enlist Michelle to help them, leaving Danny alone to finish his nap. While the episode makes it clear that Danny needs help to fulfill his parental obligations, in the end his daughters end up caring for him and themselves in a parents’ fantasy world where children are eager to do substantial chores to make life easier for their parents. At the same time, the girls learn self-reliance and the importance of family care.

Even with two live-in babysitters, and one daughter of babysitting age, the Tanner household still experiences myriad childcare hurdles. In the second episode of the series, the arrangement already appears strained on their first night as a newly-constituted family, when both Jesse and Joey want to go out after the girls are asleep, and Danny has to go to work.⁸³ Danny explains the particulars of their agreement as all three men stand by the door: “The only way that three adults can leave the house at the same time is if three children are with them. Two adults can leave, one adult can leave, three, two or one child can leave with one to three adults. But three adults can never leave with less than three children. Got it?” Another season one episode demonstrates an even more complex childcare problem, when Stephanie, Joey, and Jesse all come down with chicken

⁸³ “Our Very First Night,” *Full House*, Season One (ABC, Sept. 25, 1987).

pox.⁸⁴ This predicament leaves Danny and DJ the only ones in the house able to care for Michelle. Unfortunately, Danny has an important sporting event to cover, and DJ has her first slumber party to attend. Danny must scramble to find a babysitter in less than an hour in order to make it to work on time. His frantic search mirrors those of the many parents profiled in newspapers and magazines who lose hours and days of work to care for sick children.⁸⁵ Between calls to babysitters, Danny calls his boss and begs him not to reassign the segment to another sportscaster. When he reaches the end of his list of babysitters with no luck, Danny contemplates calling DJ home from her slumber party, but decides that that would be cruel. Just as Danny laments missing his game, DJ flies through the door, and exclaims, “I wanted to make sure you had a babysitter. Need one?” Danny is overcome with joy and pride when he learns of DJ’s sacrifice, and she utters a line that would fulfill any parents’ fantasy: “you do so much for me, this is my chance to do something nice for you. Isn’t that what being part of a family is all about?” Danny tells everyone that he is “so honored to be a part of this family,” and tells Joey and Jesse that the three of them must be “doing something right,” in the way they are raising the children.

The Tanners weather the storm of a chicken pox epidemic without interrupting Danny’s productivity at work. Even as a fifth grader, DJ shows an initiative toward personal responsibility in her decision to return from her slumber party to take care of her family and ensure their well-being and productivity. The overall goal of the episode is to prevent Michelle from contracting chicken pox. In their practice of quarantine, DJ’s self-

⁸⁴ “A Pox in Our House,” *Full House*, Season One (ABC, Jan. 29, 1988).

⁸⁵ Chapman, “Executive Guilt,” 30-37; “Jobs and Child Care Studied,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1987; Silverman “Corporate Childcare,” 503-506; Wallis, “The Child Care Dilemma,” 54-60.

sacrifice works not only to preserve the well-being of the family, both in terms of its health and its economic prosperity, but also to preserve its autonomy, by eliminating both the need for an outside babysitter, and a broader call for more available day care options.

This episode of *Full House* provides a perfect example for how television sitcoms of the 1980s present models of family governance. As Rose describes,

The modern private family remains intensively governed, it is linked in so many ways with social, economic, and political objectives. But the government here acts not through mechanisms of social control and subordination of the will, but through the promotion of subjectivities, the construction of pleasures and ambitions, and the activation of guilt, anxiety, envy, and disappointment.⁸⁶

Danny, Jesse, and Joey have molded DJ into a familial subject who feels a great sense of responsibility to her family, such that she takes pleasure in taking care of them and in helping her father make it to work on time. She bounds into the room where Danny is in despair with no small amount of enthusiasm, even though she has given up her first slumber party about which she spends the entire first half of the episode raving. However, through Danny's commitment to raising his family as an autonomous unit, with help only from an extended family network, DJ feels a need to participate in and further this ethic of family self-care.

DJ regularly cares for her sisters, and often her father, as she did in "Danny in Charge." She often wrangles Michelle and imparts older-sister wisdom to emotionally

⁸⁶ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd ed. (London: Free Association Press, 1999), 213.

fragile Stephanie.⁸⁷ In “Slumber Party,” Stephanie must deal with the absence of her mother in the face of the Honeybees’ (a variation of Girl Scouts) mother-daughter sleepover. Jesse’s fiancé Becky initially offers to take her, but ends up stranded after her car breaks down, so Joey takes her. All goes well until one of the girls demands mother-daughter makeovers, and all the girls except for Stephanie gather excitedly on the couch. Despite Joey’s willingness to participate, one of the mothers tries to suggest another activity. When one of the girls on the couch whines, “why can’t we do the makeovers?”, the camera cuts to a medium shot of Stephanie, who stands alone with Joey on the opposite side of the room. She cries out, “because of me, that’s why!” and runs out of the room as the camera cuts to a long shot showing all of the girls and their mothers grouped on one side of the frame and Stephanie and Joey alone by the door and separated from the rest of the group by a vast swath of white carpeting. Joey chases after Stephanie, and the camera zooms in on the door as he closes it behind them, emphasizing Stephanie’s isolation and longing for a maternal figure. When Stephanie returns home, DJ truncates her own sleepover, sending her best friend Kimmy home so that she can counsel Stephanie. When Danny enters the room to talk to Stephanie, DJ sends him away, pledging to take care of it. As Stephanie cries on her shoulder, DJ tells her that they are the only ones with “a Dad, an Uncle Jesse, and a Joey” and that they also have each other. They embrace, with Stephanie framed in medium close-up with tears streaming down her cheeks. This image dissolves to Danny, Joey, and Jesse lamenting Stephanie’s

⁸⁷ “The Return of Grandma,” *Full House*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 9, 1987); “The Seven-Month Itch Part 1,” *Full House*, Season One (ABC, Mar. 11, 1988); “The Seven-Month Itch Part 2”; “Slumber Party,” *Full House*, Season Four (ABC, Oct. 12, 1990); “Danny in Charge”; “A House Divided,” *Full House*, Season Seven (ABC, May 17, 1994).

pain, until Stephanie and DJ enter the room and Stephanie thanks Joey for taking her to the party and announces she is going back to do makeovers with DJ. Thus once again, DJ has sacrificed her own leisure time to help nurture her family members and provide the maternal care (in the form of feminine self-fashioning) that their adult caregivers cannot. Through *Full House*'s insistence on "lessons" the family learns by the end of each episode, the viewer is likewise addressed to adopt these family governance strategies, which the program reinforces with every episode as the viewer witnesses the family grow and prosper over nine seasons.

While television sitcoms promoted private solutions to the national day care crisis, and corporate and administrative leaders advocated workplace-based day care, both approaches worked to govern parent-citizens such that they would not rely on or ask for state assistance. The many guidelines and solutions 1980s media posed to ameliorate the day care crisis provided the sense of a multitude of options for working parents to choose between. As Rose writes about neoliberalism, "It does not seek to govern through 'society,' but through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualization and self-fulfilment. Individuals are to be governed through their freedom."⁸⁸ At the same time, the delegation of childcare to the market provoked anxiety for parents and non-parents alike. Condominium associations debated whether or not in-home daycare constituted a business, and thus a non-residential use of residential property,⁸⁹ and parents worried

⁸⁸ Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," 41.

⁸⁹ Andree Brooks, "Opening Centers in Apartments," *New York Times*, Oct. 16, 1988.

about leaving their children in the hands of “strangers.”⁹⁰ Sitcoms like *Mr. Belvedere*, *Kate & Allie*, *My Two Dads*, and *Full House* modeled ideal private solutions for viewers and showing happy, self-reliant families who did not need the public sector’s help to solve their childcare dilemmas.

⁹⁰ Of course, as Joan Williams points out, childcare workers are hardly “strangers” to the children in their care. Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32.

Chapter Four:

“You Could Call Me the Maid—But I Wouldn’t”: Lessons in Masculine Domestic Labor

Arlie Hochschild locates a “stalled revolution” in the 1980s, where women’s lives had changed, but men’s and the workplace had not. During this period, middle-class family life was increasingly in flux as parents struggled to work, care for children, and keep up with domestic chores. Hochschild found that although the majority of the women she studied were performing most of the household chores, “Most couples *wanted* to share and imagined that they did.”¹ These fantasies of equitable childcare and domestic labor divisions among couples found their expression on television screens, as sitcoms presented models of domestic management and of masculinity that complete the revolution. Indeed, one of Hochschild’s subjects “wanted to be the sort of woman who was needed and appreciated both at home and at work—like Lacey, she told me, on the television show *Cagney and Lacey*.”² Television provided models for organizing home and family life and ideals of liberated career women who could “have it all.” As chapters two and three have shown, sitcoms habitually represent the struggles that dual-income and non-nuclear families face when combining work and family, and offer up solutions for viewers dealing with similar problems. One of the principle ways women could “have it all” in this televised world, was to employ household help and in the process, shift gendered expectations of domestic labor. As chapter two shows, advertisers

¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild with Anne Machung, *The Second Shift* (Penguin Books: New York, 2003), 20.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

believed that images of men performing domestic labor were particularly attractive to the upscale female viewers who made up the most desirable audience segment. To this end, family sitcoms often constructed images of masculine domestic citizens, workers who transformed the labor of the private sphere so as to preserve some of the privileges of public citizenship.

The number of male domestic laborers and caregivers exploded on Reagan era film and television screens in films like *Mr. Mom* (dir. Stan Dragoti, 1983) and *Three Men and a Baby* (dir. Leonard Nimoy, 1987) and on television programs such as *Benson* (ABC, 1979-1986), *Eight is Enough* (ABC, 1977-1981), *Full House* (ABC, 1987-1995), *My Two Dads* (NBC, 1987-1990), *Silver Spoons* (NBC 1982-1986), *Charles in Charge* (CBS, 1984-1985; first-run syndication, 1987-1990) and *Who's the Boss?* (ABC, 1984-1992). Numerous critics caution against seeing this development as feminist or progressive,³ arguing that these films and television programs do not challenge the structure of the nuclear family. Bonnie Dow skewers family sitcoms of the 1980s for adhering to a logic of postfeminism in their assumptions that “feminist goals have been achieved, for the most part, by women’s access to the public sphere, and that ‘families

³ Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004); Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991); Philip Green, *Cracks in the Pedestal: Ideology and Gender in Hollywood* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Sarah Harwood, *Family Fictions: Representations of the Family in 1980s Hollywood Cinema* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992); Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a ‘Postfeminist’ Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Elizabeth G. Traube, *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender, and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies* (Boulder: Westview, 1992); Mary Douglas Vavrus, “Domesticating Patriarchy: Hegemonic Masculinity and Television’s ‘Mr. Mom,’” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 no. 3 (2002): 352-375.

need not change to accommodate working wives and mothers.”⁴ She labels these shows “postfeminist family television” and argues that they

[divert] attention from continuing problems women face in the workplace (unequal pay, sexual harassment, discrimination), thereby ‘posting’ feminist concerns in that arena. Second, even while trumpeting women’s success at work but never showing it, it reasserts the primacy and importance of women’s role in the family.⁵

Susan Faludi makes a similar argument about *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-1989) and *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-1992), which she claims feature working mothers with virtually invisible careers.⁶ However, by masculinizing the work of childcare and other domestic duties, these mediated family labor constructions also legitimate the oft-unpaid and undervalued work of the domestic sphere—what is typically considered “women’s work.”

Wendy Brown discusses the gendered division of labor under liberalism, paying special attention to the ways in which the public and private spheres are separately constructed for distinctly gendered subjects. She notes that the liberated, male, public citizen depends for its very being and independence on the invisible labor and confinement of the female private dependent.⁷ Thus a “crisis” emerges when women move into a workforce that is structured for men who are assumed to have a wife at home. Brown positions the private sphere as a realm governed by needs, while the public

⁴ Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism*, 99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶ Faludi, *Backlash*, 153.

⁷ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 155.

sphere is governed by rights, further encapsulating the dependent/independent gendered binary.⁸ For Brown, this division of labor is part of liberalism's subject formation, where "one group surrenders selfhood so that another group can have it."⁹ Brown is careful to point out, however, that these subject positions are not essentially gendered, and that class plays a vital role in reconfiguring the gendered separation of spheres: "the emancipation of particular women can be 'purchased' through the subordination of substitutes."¹⁰ This would appear to sum up the liberal upper middle-class feminist fantasy of escaping the home, while employing domestic help at an ostensibly cheap rate of pay. Brown continues, "gender and class converge here, as every middle- and upper-class woman knows who has purchased her liberty, personhood, and equality through child care and 'household help' by *women* earning a fraction of their boss's wage."¹¹ While upper- and middle-class white women have long employed working-class women of color, in many family sitcoms of the 1980s, men are employed to manage households, and the programs focus on the home as a place of masculine labor rather than simply as a place of masculine leisure.

The home is the primary setting for *Who's the Boss?*, *Benson*, and *Charles in Charge*. Ella Taylor notes a shift from the workplace sitcoms of the 1970s, claiming "By the middle of the 1980s the sphere of the domestic had reasserted its supremacy in the Nielsen ratings, but with a marked proliferation of family forms."¹² However, these

⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁹ Ibid., 161.

¹⁰ Ibid., 164.

¹¹ Ibid., 165. Emphasis added.

¹² Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 157.

programs crucially combine both the domestic and the workplace sitcom forms, through presenting the home as workplace. Rather than functioning as a haven for family leisure, the home is the place of employment for protagonists Tony, Benson, and Charles. That domestic labor is recognized as labor when it is performed by men is significant. As Brown argues, “if men become too selfless, even in the household, their masculinity is called into question: this is the discomfiting figure of the househusband.”¹³ In other words, women are expected to be selfless and to not ask for monetary compensation for their work in the home, but in order for Tony, Benson, and Charles to maintain their status as civil subjects, their work in the home must be in some respects for their own (financial) self-interest. Thus, it is fitting that even when Tony and his boss Angela start dating and finally get engaged, she continues to pay him for his housework. This tendency is manifest in Tony’s insistence on the label “housekeeper,” going so far as to threaten Angela’s client who seems incredulous about the moniker by saying, “you could call me the maid—but I wouldn’t.” Through this semantic shift, Tony claims a managerial role (“housekeeper” implying some sort of ownership), rather than a title steeped in servitude (and femininity) like “maid.” This insistence on naming is not insignificant. According to Rosie Cox, despite their setbacks in labor organizing, domestic laborers “do resist. They can do this as individuals by refusing to accept definitions of themselves as ‘just a cleaner’ or ‘just an au pair’.”¹⁴ For his part, Benson is considered “management” in the governor’s mansion, and though his previous position was as a butler (in *Soap*, ABC, 1977-1981), he solves not only household but also

¹³ Brown, *States of Injury*, 162.

¹⁴ Rosie Cox, *The Servant Problem: Domestic Employment in a Global Economy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 126.

governmental problems from his desk in the kitchen. Charles is “in charge” of two different families over the series’ five seasons, and he performs vital emotional labor that the children’s parents are not able to provide in exchange for room and board and an ostensibly small salary. Still, *Who’s the Boss?*, *Benson*, and *Charles in Charge* suggest that domestic work is not only financially, but also personally fulfilling for Tony, Benson, and Charles, just as it is supposed to be for women. All three men remain in the home even when they are offered more lucrative positions outside of it, and the programs imply that they stay with their surrogate families largely due to their emotional ties.

The centrality of domestic labor in these shows, and the value the characters place on it, provides an important lesson to viewers of the 1980s familiar with the media image of the “superwoman.” According to Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild, the ideal of the career woman who can “do it all” often masks professional women’s reliance on domestic laborers, who “make the house hotel-room perfect, feed and bathe the children, cook and clean up—and then magically fade from sight.”¹⁵ *Who’s the Boss?*, *Benson*, and *Charles in Charge* effectively raise the literal and figurative value of household labor. As Cox points out,

The status of domestic work and care work in home and institutional settings is very low, as are average wages. This lack of recognition and remuneration helps to demoralize workers and prevents others from joining the sector. Much of the work that carers and domestic workers do is considered to be unskilled and the knowledge and qualities needed to do

¹⁵ Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, “Introduction,” in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, eds. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (New York: Holt, 2002), 4.

it go unrecognized. The importance of the work, to the people being cared for, their families and society more generally, is rarely considered.¹⁶

By transposing the workplace onto the domestic sitcom, these programs argue that domestic labor is in fact labor that should be paid and valued. However, because the protagonists maintain much of their status as civil subjects, the programs suggest that this work is only legitimate as work because those who perform it are still in some ways liberated, rights-governed citizens, even though they have taken positions within the needs-based economy of the private sphere. These programs offer models for masculine domestic subjectivity, at a time when men were increasingly being called upon to perform more domestic duties by women and often popular media. They also offer lessons in domestic labor and household governance, providing different models of masculine household management. Episodes supply models for different styles of management: *Benson* provides a model of scientific efficiency, delegating tasks and running the governor's mansion and the state simultaneously; *Who's the Boss?* showcases familial sacrifice and compromise as essential management tools; *Charles in Charge* presents a model of family governance primarily through emotional labor that leads family members to care for themselves. At the same time, Tony, Benson, and Charles act as comic figures that allow for the expression (and/or repression) of cultural anxieties around the nexus of class, race, gender, and domestic labor.

Finally, *Who's the Boss?*, *Benson*, and *Charles in Charge* provide female viewers with idyllic pictures of households that function particularly well thanks to the (paid) domestic work performed by men. As Patricia Mellencamp argues about *Who's the*

¹⁶ Cox, *The Servant Problem*, 53.

Boss? “In many ways, this series, not taken seriously by anyone, might indeed be a middle-class female fantasy rather than contradiction. Angela has the best of both worlds without being trapped in either.”¹⁷ Sexual tension structures *Who’s the Boss?*, which sees Angela and Tony’s employer-employee relationship shift toward romance. The program frequently represents Tony as eye candy, often shirtless, dressed in tight pants, or wearing shirts that expose his muscular arms. Similarly, Scott Baio was a teen idol mainstay of the late 1970s and 1980s, a fact *Charles in Charge* frequently exploits. The program delights in showcasing a promising younger generation of men who would contribute more to domestic chores and childcare. While *Benson* relies less on its star’s physical appearance, and more on Robert Guillaume’s talent and reputation as a gifted comedic actor, the program still holds much appeal for women struggling to manage home, work, and family, as he runs the governor’s mansion with impeccable precision, going above and beyond the call of duty to make sure the house and the lives of its occupants run as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

Benson’s Domestic and Governmental Efficiency

While Tony insists on the title “housekeeper,” Benson ups the ante. As boss to head housekeeper Gretchen Kraus (and the rest of the governor’s mansion staff), his title is “manager of household affairs.”¹⁸ Much of the humor in *Benson* comes from Benson’s relationship with the bumbling governor, Gene Gatling. The governor is, for the most part, completely incompetent, and his jokes are reminiscent of Gracie Allen’s—heavily dependent on overly literal interpretations of the words of others. The running joke is

¹⁷ Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, and Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 351.

¹⁸ Taylor reveals this official title in “The Layoff,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 25, 1979).

that Benson would be more fit to be governor than Gatling, encapsulated in the episode “The Layoff” where, after one of their regular late-night chats, the governor heads toward the servants’ quarters, and Benson heads toward the governor’s. Just after walking offscreen, they catch themselves and reverse course. This joke comes to its logical conclusion during the final season, when Benson runs against Gatling to be governor. Throughout the series, Benson not only must teach the governor how to be a good father to Katie,¹⁹ he regularly takes over for the governor in policy decisions (usually giving the governor full credit). In the pilot episode, “Change,” Benson makes it very clear that his duties will extend beyond household management.²⁰ His first day on the job, Benson meets Katie who explains to him that she is very upset with her father because a new development plan he is backing will necessitate the removal (and therefore death) of beavers native to the area. When the governor lets Benson know that he is in a tough spot caught between the need to create industrial jobs and the environmental cause of preserving wildlife, Benson stays up all night to devise a plan that will allow the development project to move forward without removing the beavers. He interrupts the governor’s press conference to deliver the plan, which he bills as belonging to the governor, to the delight of both environmentalists and businesspeople alike. He thus gets the governor out of a potential jam with voters, special interest groups, and, perhaps most importantly, his daughter, thus solving personal, familial problems as he simultaneously solves public, political problems.

¹⁹ In, for example, “Conflict of Interest,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 18, 1979), and “Don’t Quote Me,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Nov. 22, 1979).

²⁰ “Change,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Sept. 13, 1979).

Benson's household role harks back to the ideals of domestic science in the early twentieth century. As Taylorist efficiency rose to prominence in industrial culture, the national obsession with efficient production made its way into the domestic sphere, through advocates of "domestic science" like Ellen Richards and Christine Frederick. Efficiency became even more of an obsessive mantra for time-starved dual career couples in the 1980s and 1990s, as Arlie Hochschild shows.²¹ Domestic efficiency is a primary focal point in *Benson*. In the pilot episode, the governor's secretary Marcy tells Benson his job is to run the governor's mansion efficiently, organize things, and "eliminate waste." Another season one episode, "Kraus Affair," finds Benson negotiating with the laundry service and inspecting the meat delivery, as the B-plot revolves around cutting costs at the mansion to set an example for the Taxpayers' Association.²² According to Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, "The new 'scientific management' meshed immediately with the domestic scientists' goals of eliminating (or redefining) drudgery and elevating housekeeping to a challenging activity."²³ To this end, Frederick and other domestic scientists suggested,

Housewives, who spent family funds, must similarly learn about market conditions (when to buy and what to pay) and make their decisions according to their particular needs, family incomes, and express goals. 'In other words, every woman running the business of homemaking must *train herself* to become an efficient "purchasing agent" for her particular

²¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997).

²² "Kraus Affair," *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Jan. 31, 1980).

²³ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978), 162.

firm or family, by study, watchfulness, and practice.’ This new role offered housewives a truly managerial position in the modern household that stood at the intersection of the previously separate spheres.²⁴

From the very first episode, Benson takes on the role of “purchasing agent,” auditing Kraus’ grocery bill. He admonishes her for not saving leftovers, which she dismisses as a disgrace, a practice below the class standards of the governor’s mansion. Though initially Benson seems to back off, allowing Kraus to maintain her protocol, Kraus later finds leftovers in the fridge, evidence that Benson has taken charge of the household economy.

The first season episode “The Layoff” opens with Benson once again going over Kraus’ grocery expenditures, decrying the amount of money she spent on candied yams. He spends the rest of the episode finding ways to cut costs, starting with cancelling the weekly changing of all the light bulbs in the mansion. When he balks at the prospect of firing five mansion employees, the governor’s political advisor Taylor reminds him, “aren’t you the manager of household affairs?” This scene cuts to Benson sitting at his desk in the kitchen reviewing employee files. He considers the assistant groundskeeper, whose only job is to turn the sprinklers on and off, and the seamstress, who is currently engaged in monogramming cocktail napkins. However, Marcy provides him with a sob story for each, convincing him to keep them. She is less convincing in her attempt to save Miss Ellie, the elderly pastry chef. Benson explains that Miss Ellie does not perform an essential task, that rather, she’s a “luxury.” However, Benson is so distraught

²⁴ Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 247.

over the firings, the next scene opens with him on the phone, attempting to secure new jobs for those he's letting go. He has yet to break the news to Miss Ellie, and to make his job all the more difficult, she enters the kitchen carrying homemade fudge which she gives to Taylor, and a rose for Marcy, which she thought would "brighten up" Marcy's desk. She informs Kraus that she is making strawberry tarts. Miss Ellie reveals herself to be a model homemaker, selflessly producing joy for those around her. When Benson asks how she has time to make so many people happy, she replies, framed in close-up, that her "whole life [is] doing little things for people. This is my home, Benson, and everyone here is very dear to me. Everyone here is my family." After this heartfelt speech, Benson loses his nerve to fire her. Still, Miss Ellie's old-fashioned ideals of homemaking are incompatible with Benson's new plan of housekeeping efficiency. He regains his nerve the next day, and fires Miss Ellie as she performs another "luxury" task, carefully arranging flowers in the parlor. Though Miss Ellie tells Benson she understands, and that it is his job to fire her, she still leaves the mansion in tears. Here *Benson* presents homemakers as a dying breed, their labor frivolous, and instead positions efficient management as the preferable mode of household governance.

As Benson excises the last vestiges of homemaking from the governor's mansion in favor of Taylorist efficiency, he achieves the logical conclusion of and the anxiety provoked by the domestic science advocates, where the

scientific home—swept clean of the cobwebs of sentiment, windows opened wide to the light of science—was simply a workplace like any

other. No sticky dependencies held the scientific housekeeper to her home, only a clear sense of professional commitment.²⁵

Kraus is a perfect example of this kind of detached housekeeper, as many jokes revolve around her being a cold-hearted automaton. Benson, despite his obsession with efficiency, still does not allow the mansion to be completely given over to science. In the episode “Conflict of Interest,” he plays surrogate father to Katie when she feels neglected by her father. As Benson tries to convince the governor not to attend a function at the White House in favor of attending Katie’s school play, he delivers an emotionally charged speech that indicates his dedication to maintaining the mansion as a loving family home. He tells the governor, “Katie’s a part of this job that I didn’t bargain for. I didn’t come here to be a nanny for an eight-year-old orphan, just the same I can’t help caring about her. There’s a lot that I don’t mind doing for Katie, but one thing I can’t do is be her father.” Similarly, in “Trust Me,” when Katie sneaks out to see a KISS concert after her father has grounded her, Benson disciplines her, laying on an elaborate guilt-trip that quickly teaches her a lesson. Benson becomes Katie’s confidante, a status that allows him to nurture her while simultaneously solving political snafus. In “Checkmate,” Benson figures out that Katie is hiding a homesick Russian child chess prodigy, and comes up with an elaborate plan to reunite him with his family while maintaining diplomatic relations with his handlers, and by extension, the Soviet Union.²⁶ Benson is also able to deduce that Katie is responsible for an embarrassing leak to the press, when

²⁵ Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 168.

²⁶ “Checkmate,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Feb. 7, 1980).

he picks up on the fact that she wanted to impress her peers at school.²⁷ The resolution of the episode “Conflict of Interest” makes clear Benson’s fatherly dedication to Katie, as he and the governor bicker over who knows Katie’s bedtime routine better. Katie resolves their dispute over whether or not she likes to sleep with the window open by telling them to simply leave it half open, a resolution that tellingly does not reveal which one of them is right (and thus, which one of them is a better “father”).

While ensuring efficiency appears to be Benson’s main household task, the domestic science model was not so successful in most U.S. households. The Taylorist model did not work out so well for housewives, who were not able to delegate tasks. Instead, “For the homemaker, household scientific management turned out to mean *new* work—the new managerial tasks of analyzing one’s chores in detail, planning, record-keeping, etc.... Then there was the massive clerical work of maintaining a family filing system.”²⁸ Benson takes on this “new” work, leaving the “old” work to the rest of the household staff. He does this new work in the very place the domestic scientist-housewife was supposed to do it—from a desk in the kitchen. Frederick suggested that “Like the busy executive who needs a place to keep his papers, the homemaker ‘needs an “office” corner, no matter how humble, where she can go to plan her menus, write out her orders and make up her accounts.’”²⁹ Most episodes of *Benson* open and close with Benson at his desk, going over paperwork of one kind or another. This task is symbolic of his position as “management,” as unlike Tony in *Who’s the Boss?*, he rarely engages in tasks that could be considered “drudgery.” He and Kraus bicker over the arrangement of

²⁷ “Don’t Quote Me.”

²⁸ Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 163.

²⁹ Strasser, *Never Done*, 249.

a banquet table in “Old Man Gatling,”³⁰ and he regularly serves the governor coffee during the day and warm milk at night. Yet more demanding and “demeaning tasks” like heavy cleaning are never part of Benson’s daily work, with the exception of the labor he assumes during a staff strike. In the pilot, before Benson knows what his duties will be, he walks into the parlor and exclaims, “well, I ain’t cleanin’ this. No way am I gonna clean this, this is a career!” And indeed, the cleaning is left up to staff members dressed in traditional black and white maid’s uniforms. While Benson has achieved an air of professionalism in his managerial role, the labor of those under him has not. According to Ehrenreich and English, one of the failures of the domestic science movement is the professionalization of domestic labor. They note, “in one central way the reformers would have had to admit defeat: their promise to feminism—the upgrading of housekeeping to professional status—had been broken along the way. Instead of becoming an elite corps of professionals, homemakers were as surely as ever a vast corps of menial workers.”³¹

Yet despite Benson’s management title, his stint as the governor’s cousin Jessica Tate’s butler in *Soap* leaves a stain on his class position. In the episode “Benson in Love,” Benson falls unknowingly for a state senator, Francine.³² After they have gone on several dates, the governor’s staff begins to gossip. Taylor expresses concern about the budding romance to Marcy, suggesting that Francine’s political party is worried about potential ramifications to her career. Taylor exclaims, “do you know what the papers can make of her running around with a butler!?” While Marcy tries to interject that Benson is

³⁰ “Old Man Gatling,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Mar. 6, 1980).

³¹ Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 179.

³² “Benson in Love,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 4, 1979).

not “just” a butler, Taylor retorts, “Benson may be a climber, but he’s out of his class.” This comment on the one hand refers to Benson’s new management position, but it also expresses Taylor’s resentment of Benson’s consistent influence on the governor and Benson’s disdain for Taylor. Throughout the episode, Benson continuously expresses his anxiety over his cross-class relationship, and when Francine rejects his marriage proposal, he explains that he understands, pointing to his hands while he says, “the callouses are here,” then pointing to his head, “not here, senator!” Yet Francine dismisses his class critique, arguing that she is an independent, career-driven woman who does not see marriage in her future. While Francine wants to continue their relationship as is, Benson leaves her apartment, and the episode concludes with him fixing Katie’s roller skate. This episode is one of the only episodes in the first season that portrays Benson’s life outside of work. The majority of the program’s action takes place within the governor’s mansion, and when Benson travels outside of the home, it is usually for governmental purposes. “Benson in Love,” provides the viewer with a rare glimpse into Benson’s private life, only to have that door slammed when he is rejected and reminded of his place as a domestic laborer. This lack of a private life beyond his place of employment mirrors the work conditions for many live-in domestic laborers, who often find themselves perpetually on the clock, and harks back to earlier sitcoms featuring black domestics like *Beulah* (ABC, 1950-1952), which, as L.S. Kim has pointed out, represented none of its title character’s private life.

At the same time, Benson’s race and class come in handy for the governor, paradoxically elevating Benson above household help to a vital member of the governor’s

political staff. In “The President’s Double,” Benson impersonates an African leader who is under threat of attack, when he is the only available black man who fits the man’s description.³³ In the process, he helps prevent a violent fringe group from taking over the fictional African country, while the reception he planned to coordinate himself goes off without a hitch. In “Takin’ it to the Streets,” Benson helps the governor understand the working class, when Taylor’s elitist sensibility proves inadequate.³⁴ He escorts the governor to a dive bar, and they take a seat next to a black construction worker, who is in “no rush to get home” because his “wife went back to work.” The bartender commiserates, noting that the only way to keep up with the cost of living is with two incomes. The governor is eager to participate in their conversation, but Benson must coach him on working-class decorum and he is forced to diffuse tense situations when the governor fumbles his performance.

Benson is consistently sympathetic to working-class politics, and he supports the governor’s mansion staff in their bid for higher wages, emphasizing the value of domestic work. In the season one episode, “One Strike, You’re Out,” Benson is forced to walk the line between worker and management.³⁵ Benson sympathizes with the striking workers, though he is nominally management, and promises that the governor will give them a raise. In the meantime, he, Marcy, and Katie pick up the slack of household chores like folding towels, polishing silver, and vacuuming. Unfortunately, Benson and his impromptu household staff do the work a bit too well, resulting in the workers pressuring Benson to strike, and in Katie calling Benson a “sore,” which Marcy corrects, “scab.”

³³ “The President’s Double,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Sept. 27, 1979).

³⁴ “Takin’ it to the Streets,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Mar. 27, 1980).

³⁵ “One Strike, You’re Out,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Dec. 27, 1979).

Rather than further harm the staff's strike, Benson tells the governor he is resigning, only to be told that as management, it is his duty to fill in. Benson replies, "telling myself I'm management doesn't change how I feel. I've been a worker all my life. I still am."

However, instead of resigning, Benson and Marcy come up with a scheme to convince both the governor and the state finance committee to raise wages as they sabotage a dinner party. Benson dresses as a butler in a white jacket and bow tie, and serves dinner by tossing rolls across the table and sloppily and carelessly serving a poorly executed meal. Thanks to Benson's heroic act (and his willingness to periodically engage in servitude and drudgery), the governor informs the staff, the finance committee has granted them a raise. Benson plays a hand in increasing the value of domestic labor by showing the governor and the finance committee both its importance and the skill required to execute it well.

"Tony is More Than Just a Housekeeper": Who's the Boss? and Exceptional Homemaking

Tony's approach to household management is similar to Benson's in terms of attention to detail and efficiency, however Tony also preserves much of the emotional labor of homemaking. The fifth season episode "Working Girls," provides overt training for Tony's style of domestic work, when Tony's daughter Samantha's high school class does a project where the students shadow different careers.³⁶ Tony and Angela promote their jobs to Samantha and her friend Bonnie, who are the last to choose careers, after Tony overhears a boy complaining about his assignment working at a mortuary, then conceding, "it could have been worse. I could have been stuck cleaning house with Mr.

³⁶ "Working Girls," *Who's the Boss?*, Season Five (ABC, Apr. 11, 1989).

Micelli.” Tony’s pitches are “who wants to learn how to balance a household budget” and “who wants to make their own hours,” countered by Angela offering a backstage glimpse at a jeans commercial shoot. Samantha picks Tony to shadow, thinking it will be a cushy job, but of course, he immediately proves her wrong, and along the way offers household management guidelines for the viewer. Tony refers to his position as that of “domestic engineer,” thus masculinizing traditionally feminized housework, and aligning himself with the domestic science movement like Benson. Tony provides Samantha with a list of chores to do for the day, then offers his “philosophy of household management”: “a household is an intricate ecosystem where man and house coexist in harmonic symbiosis.” When Samantha interjects her dismay at being told to make Jonathan’s bed, Tony attempts to shift her perspective, retorting, “we don’t make beds. We create a peaceful sleeping environment.” While the episode plays Tony’s Zen approach to housekeeping for laughs, his earnest delivery of these lines suggests that he truly believes this mantra and that it contributes to his contentment working in the home. Samantha, however, does not buy into his philosophy and feels miserable and underappreciated. When Tony returns home and asks what she has prepared for dinner, she is outraged at his expectation. When Tony tells her that dinner preparation is 23rd on her list, Samantha replies, “I’m on four.” Tony tries to calm her down, relaying some expert wisdom: “I’ve had my days were I feel underappreciated, undervalued, and underpaid, but then Sam, I step back and I take a look at the bigger picture and I realize, wow, it’s all worthwhile.” Once again here, Tony emphasizes the self-fulfillment of domestic labor, and he

references the fact that she is making the home more comfortable for the rest of the family, implying that making others happy should, in turn, make her happy.

While Samantha's disparagement of domestic labor occupies much of the first part of the episode, the rest focuses on Samantha's jealousy of Bonnie's close relationship with Angela. Samantha rebuffs domestic work not just because she hates it, but also to be closer to Angela. She convinces Bonnie to switch positions with her momentarily, and Bonnie develops a close relationship with Tony, too, but the episode ends with both girls going to work with Angela. As Samantha says early in the episode, she and Bonnie are "women of the nineties" and they "want it all." At the same time that *Who's the Boss?* offers lessons in household management, it also offers a liberal feminist fantasy wherein a woman can maintain a successful career and have a happy and well-managed home life. Indeed, according to Tania Modleski,

despite the notorious problems inherent in claims for the subversiveness of comedy as a genre, feminists themselves have found the realm of comedy and carnival to be an important arena both for the working out of utopian desire and for ideological and psychical subversions of the dominant regime.³⁷

E. Ann Kaplan also notes the prevalence of comedy in cultural images of domestic and nurturing men, suggesting that this subject matter could not be taken seriously in dramatic programming.³⁸ While Susan Faludi disdains the character of Angela, who she dismisses as "so selfishly self-absorbed by her professional ambitions that her muscular

³⁷ Modleski, *Feminism Without Women*, 85-6.

³⁸ Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, 188.

male housekeeper has to take charge of her kids [*sic*],”³⁹ Faludi herself shows a paradoxical and disturbing bias against professional women, in assuming that Angela’s focus on her career makes her selfish or self-absorbed. Rather, *Who’s the Boss?* presents a liberal middle-class (white) feminist fantasy where a man enjoys performing domestic duties and is happy to support his female partner in a successful career.

The *Who’s the Boss?* series finale epitomizes the feminized theme of self-sacrifice for love and family. *Who’s the Boss?* ended its eight-season run with a three-part episode story arch where Tony takes a job teaching and coaching baseball at a small college in Iowa (an especially unrealistic storyline, given that Tony only holds a bachelor’s degree).⁴⁰ By this point in the series, Tony and Angela are engaged, and the two of them carry on an especially difficult long distance relationship. Earlier episodes in the final season focus on Tony’s quest for self-betterment and career development. He began attending college at the beginning of the fifth season,⁴¹ and he decides to become a teacher in the sixth season.⁴² In the final episode, Angela moves to Iowa to be with Tony, momentarily making the feminine sacrifice of career for love.⁴³ Angela’s avowed reasons for temporarily leaving her career in Connecticut resemble the “choice” discourses of new traditionalism that Elspeth Probyn details in *thirtysomething* (ABC,

³⁹ Faludi, *Backlash*, 155. N.B. Angela only has one child, Jonathan.

⁴⁰ “Savor the Veal (1),” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Eight (ABC, Apr. 18, 1992); “Savor the Veal (2),” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Eight (ABC, Apr. 25, 1992); “Savor the Veal (3),” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Eight (ABC, Apr. 25, 1992).

⁴¹ “My Fair Tony,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Five (ABC, Oct. 25, 1988).

⁴² “To Tony, With Love,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Six (ABC, Nov. 28, 1989).

⁴³ “Savor the Veal (3).”

1987-1991).⁴⁴ Angela tells Tony that she wants to “lead the simple life. Do all the things I’ve always wanted to do—painting, gardening.” While she speaks this line in a dreamy voice, framed in a soft focus medium close-up for ultimate feminine effect, the episode immediately undercuts this supposed contentment in a flash-forward to one month later where Angela sits in the same place in the kitchen, clipping coupons and talking on the phone. As she mentions a sale at Piggly Wiggly, her joy in her career resurfaces as she says, “boy, if they were my client, the first thing I’d do is change the—” and she trails off, catching herself. Tony comes home from teaching, and Angela is thrust into the supportive role, listening to the accomplishments of his day. When Tony inquires as to her own day, Angela replies, “another day, another afghan,” and the camera pans right to reveal two couches littered with afghans, apparently her new hobby. Along with her transformation into a housewife, Angela also adopts a lower-class lifestyle, commensurate with her rural Iowa surroundings. When the rest of the family comes for a visit, Angela is clad in a bowling shirt, shocking the family. When she goes to hug her mother Mona, Mona exclaims, “attention K-Mart shoppers!” and asks whether or not the tractor pull was rained out. In order for Angela to become Tony’s subordinate, she must sacrifice her class privilege, finally allowing for the articulation of Tony’s male privilege.

Mona outs Angela’s performance of both class and gender identities by tricking her into admitting her lust for her career. One minute Angela says she does not care what happens at the advertising agency, but when Mona lies and tells her that an important client wants out, Angela immediately comes up with a plan to woo him back. Mona tells

⁴⁴ Elspeth Probyn, “New Traditionalism and Post-Feminism: TV Does the Home,” in *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, eds. Charlotte Brunson, Julie D’Acci, and Lynn Spigel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126-137.

Angela that she cannot fool her, and Angela admits, “it’s beginning to wear a little thin here” but tells Mona that she can “grin and bear it.” As she speaks that line, Tony bursts into the kitchen, demanding dinner, at which point Angela says, “dinner’s almost ready, sweetheart,” and Mona counters sarcastically, “well, you’ve got the grin down.” As Angela puts meatloaf on a serving platter, Tony exclaims proudly to Mona, “isn’t this a switch? The woman cooking and the *man* bringing home the bacon. I’ve come a long way baby!” Tony’s invocation of the “feminist”-inspired Virginia Slims campaign aligns his move from the private sphere to the public sphere with 1970s liberal middle-class feminism, a move which, as Brown shows, inevitably subordinates another, in this case, Angela. However, when Tony’s one-year contract is extended for three more years, Angela breaks up with him in order to return to her job in Connecticut.

This episode briefly reverses the gender role reversal on which the entire series is based—thus by reversing the reversal, the conventional gender roles appear strange and unnatural, as the logic of the series was from the beginning completely different. As Jeffrey Sconce argues, “What television lacks in spectacle and narrative constraints, it makes up for in depth and duration of character relations, diegetic expansion, and audience investment.”⁴⁵ These aspects of television programming work to denaturalize the gendered spheres, at least within the diegesis of *Who’s the Boss?*. To see Tony as the “breadwinner” and Angela as the “housewife” is jarring to the invested viewer, who longs for the equilibrium to which the sitcom generically returns. Indeed, *Who’s the Boss?* as a series concludes by returning to the equilibrium of the gender role reversal.

⁴⁵ Jeffrey Sconce, “What If?: Charting Television’s New Textual Boundaries,” in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 95.

The final episode ends as the series began—Tony arrives at Angela’s door, and asks to be her housekeeper. While he claims that he will look for jobs “in the area,” he already failed in a Connecticut-based job search two episodes prior,⁴⁶ so it seems likely that he would remain Angela’s housekeeper, a decision he makes as a career sacrifice for love. Tony’s work in the home is valued (and monetarily compensated), and this episode especially emphasizes Tony’s value for the household, as Angela has gone through several housekeepers in search of one who approaches Tony’s level of distinction. Domestic labor is valued and compensated, but it also maintains its associations with familial needs and the feminine personal fulfillment that supposedly goes along with caring for the home and family.

While Tony’s career is the main narrative force of *Who’s the Boss?*, Angela’s career is not only present onscreen, but it is also firmly feminist. Angela’s dealings with sexual harassment and discrimination work against Dow’s model of the postfeminist family sitcom—in no way does *Who’s the Boss?* suggest that because Angela has an upper middle-class job, feminism has done its work. The first season episode “Protecting the President,” deals specifically with gender discrimination at Angela’s advertising agency.⁴⁷ Vice President Jim Peterson, a recurring character, attempts to usurp Angela’s position as President when a new Chairman of the Board is appointed. The very beginning of the episode emphasizes Angela’s position in the company as a marginalized one, as Jim shows up to tell her the news of the personnel shake-up. When Jim refuses to disclose his source, Angela deduces that he heard it “in the executive men’s room,” and

⁴⁶ “Savor the Veal (1).”

⁴⁷ “Protecting the President,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Jan. 22, 1985).

then tells him that the news is just “a washroom rumor.” However, as she dismisses his claim, the phone rings to confirm the new Chairman. Here the narrative explicitly positions Angela as an outsider in the company of which she is the president, all on account of her lack of access to the men’s bathroom. Angela expresses anxiety over Jim’s potential to convince the new Chairman to appoint him President, telling Tony “he’s real good at being one of the boys. He drinks scotch, talks sports. He knows all the dirty jokes.” When Angela throws a party to welcome the new Chairman, Jim shows his true colors, making the sexism of the workplace perfectly clear. Jim tells Tony that Angela has had a “free ride” to the top, implying she used sex to secure her powerful position. While Angela wavers on how to handle the situation—both how to quiet Jim and maintain her position as president—she finally confronts Jim, telling him that if he spreads more “smutty innuendo” that she will fire him. As in any sitcom, this conflict is nominally “resolved,” at the end of the episode: Jim seems to understand his job is at stake if he continues to discriminate against Angela. However, Jim does not disappear, nor does his overt sexism.⁴⁸ Angela continually has to deal with him and the other men she works with until she opens her own advertising agency, which she staffs solely with women.⁴⁹ These situations would have been especially relatable to many white, middle-class working women viewers, and Angela’s ability to reinvent the workplace when she opens The Bower Agency represents a particular triumph in the context of the “stalled

⁴⁸ Jim appears in “Truth in Dating,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Dec. 4, 1984); “Angela’s Ex (2),” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Feb. 12, 1985); “Junior Executive,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Two (ABC, Jan. 7, 1986); “Not With My Client, You Don’t,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Two (ABC, Mar. 18, 1986); “Angela Gets Fired (1),” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Three (ABC, Sept. 23, 1986); “Mona’s Limo,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Three (ABC, Nov. 4, 1986).

⁴⁹ “Angela Gets Fired (2),” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Three (ABC, Sept. 30, 1986). Even after Angela opens her own agency, she still occasionally has run-ins with Jim, who tries to steal her first client in “Mona’s Limo.”

revolution.” In the world of *Who’s the Boss?*, Angela has managed to revolutionize both home and work, completing one version of the feminist revolution.

Who’s the Boss? also regularly grapples with issues of class and Tony’s role in the home, making it an exceptional television engagement with liberal feminism. As Lauren Rabinovitz notes in her analysis of *Designing Women* (CBS, 1986-1993) and *Murphy Brown* (CBS, 1988-1998), “Although television consistently articulates feminism as reformist, liberal, and progressive, it simultaneously disavows any racial or class determinants.”⁵⁰ As Patricia Mellencamp puts it, “The equality between [Tony and Angela] might be the result of this monetary inequality: his low economic and professional status and her executive achievements and economic power.”⁵¹ In addition to class, the program makes frequent references to Tony’s ethnic background, and he returns periodically to his working-class Italian American neighborhood in Brooklyn. He and Angela acknowledge these differences quite often, he referring to her as a WASP,⁵² and her calling his familial ideals “ethnic.”⁵³ While in general Angela is sensitive to Tony’s class position, so much so that her neighbors complain that their own household help are agitating for pay comparable to his,⁵⁴ she can be quick to pull rank if she feels as though Tony has overstepped his bounds.⁵⁵ An early episode establishes the class tension between Tony and Angela, but also Tony’s status as a rights-governed citizen, when

⁵⁰ Lauren Rabinovitz, “Ms.-Representation: The Politics of Feminist Sitcoms,” in *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, eds. Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 145.

⁵¹ Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 351.

⁵² “Angela’s First Fight,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Oct. 23, 1984).

⁵³ “Guess Who’s Coming Forever?,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Jan. 29, 1985).

⁵⁴ “Housekeepers Unite,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Four (ABC, Mar. 15, 1988).

⁵⁵ In “Protecting the President,” Angela literally tells Tony, “I’m pulling rank, this is your employer speaking,” when he doesn’t want to tell her what Jim Peterson really said about her.

Tony attempts to prove to the other housekeepers in the neighborhood that he and Angela have a close friendly relationship that goes deeper than employer/employee by painting her car red rather than her choice, beige.⁵⁶ When Tony once again insists on his title as “housekeeper” rather than “maid,” the other housekeepers in the neighborhood tell him that Angela thinks of him as the latter.

When Angela confronts Tony after seeing her car, the camera frames them in a series of medium two shots, keeping both of them in each shot as the camera cuts in a shot/reverse-shot pattern. The consistent framing of both of them in an editing pattern which would normally exclude one or the other emphasizes the closeness of their relationship, but also the impending fight. When Tony offers to pay to have the car repainted, the camera cuts to a medium close-up of Angela as she tells him it will cost \$1500. The cut to the closer shot underscores the shift to a much more serious situation, and after Tony makes another joke in the reverse shot, the camera cuts back to Angela, now outraged, who begins to put Tony in his place. The camera cuts to a jarringly tight close-up of Tony who begins to protest, but Angela interrupts him and the camera cuts to a medium shot of her. The tight close-up on Tony juxtaposed with the longer shot of Angela leads the viewer to identify strongly with Tony, who the viewer knows will be deeply hurt by Angela’s speech. While the earlier editing pattern of the equal shot/reverse-shot structure leads the viewer to see both sides of the story, the unequal framing of Tony and Angela privileges Tony’s feelings and makes Angela’s diatribe seem incredibly harsh. Angela moves toward the kitchen door in medium shot and tells Tony, “I don’t pay you to make decisions around here, I pay you to do the damn floors.

⁵⁶ “Paint Your Wagon,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Jan. 15, 1985).

You are just the maid around here and don't you forget it!" After she delivers this line, she leaves the kitchen and the camera cuts back to another tight close-up of Tony, who stands shocked, his mouth agape as the frame fades to black. Though Tony does not get the last word with Angela in this scene, he gets the last word with the viewer, as there is no comparable shot of Angela feeling remorse for her statement.

Using a strategy similar to Benson's in "One Strike, You're Out," Tony self-consciously plays the role of a maid (or butler), dressing in a butler's uniform as opposed to his usual casual wear. He rearranges the entire family routine in order to live up to Angela's avowed expectations of him to be merely the help. He refers to Angela as "Mrs. Bower", "ma'am," or "madam," calls her son "master Jonathan," and refers to himself and his daughter as "the hired help." He sets a formal dinner table for only Angela and Jonathan, and when he reveals the menu (prime rib, Yorkshire pudding, baby peas), Jonathan asks why he cannot have the franks and beans that Tony and Samantha are having. Tony replies, "your station in life, sir." Finally Angela gives in at the end of the episode, telling Tony that if she really wanted a maid, she never would have hired a "headstrong, opinionated, pain in the neck" like him. This admission is particularly telling—Tony's insubordination marks him as not-a-maid, but it also marks him as a rights-governed citizen, and paradoxically, a *more* valuable domestic laborer who can participate as a fully engaged member of the family.

This episode, like many in the series, is highly ambivalent in its melding of class and gender politics. As Angela asserts to Mona, Tony indeed had "no right" to go against her wishes in painting her car. Mona tries to put it in perspective for Angela, agreeing

that Tony was wrong, but reminding Angela that Tony is “a human being” and that her car is just “a hunk of metal.” The gendered nature of Tony’s move over Angela’s head is clear when he tells the man who picks up Angela’s car to be painted that he is “the man of the house.” Thus, the episode implies, by virtue of his gender and his position as household manager, Tony is authorized to make decisions for Angela. In the end, Tony appears to be right, as Angela decides to leave her car red and Tony tries to get her to admit that she really likes it. Here Tony remains a rights-governed citizen—though Mona and Angela both agree that he had no “right” to paint the car red, in fact he was “right” in choosing the color Angela really wanted, but was perhaps too conservative to ask for. As Brown claims, women under liberalism “are without the mark of subjective sovereignty, the capacity to desire or choose.”⁵⁷ Tony’s class and the tension it creates within the household and in his relationship with Angela is never fully resolved within the series. Episodes frequently revolve around economic and/or social problems, yet Tony always maintains his pride, a characteristic all the other characters openly admire.⁵⁸ He also takes great pride in his work in the home, maintaining a kitchen so spotless that when Angela’s client uses her kitchen for a commercial, the director complains that it lacks realism.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Brown, *States of Injury*, 154.

⁵⁸ The following episodes all deal explicitly with Tony’s working-class background and economic status: “Truth in Dating”; “Requiem,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Dec. 18, 1984); “Keeping Up with Marci,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Apr. 9, 1985); “Ad Man Micelli,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Two (ABC, Oct. 8, 1985); “Junior Executive”; “Daddy’s Little Montague Girl,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Three (ABC, Oct. 21, 1986); “Housekeepers Unite”; “Model Daughter,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Four (ABC, Mar. 22, 1988); “It’s Somebody’s Birthday,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Five (ABC, May 16, 1989); “A Well-Kept Housekeeper,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Eight (ABC, Nov. 2, 1991); “Grandmommie Dearest,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Eight (ABC, Nov. 23, 1991); “Tony Can You Spare a Dime?,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Eight (ABC, Jan. 4, 1992).

⁵⁹ “Life’s a Ditch,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season Six (ABC, Sept. 26, 1989).

Who's the Boss? explicitly places value on domestic labor in the episode “Housekeepers Unite,” where Tony goes on strike with other housekeepers in the neighborhood who seek a rate of pay commensurate with his. Tony’s role in leading and organizing the strike in solidarity with his fellow workers is especially important given the historical difficulties in organizing domestic laborers. As Cox points out,

Domestic workers are a notoriously difficult group to organize because of their isolation in separate houses. This presents practical problems because domestic workers do not necessarily know each other or meet up as a group, and they may not have the same time off or be able to travel far to meetings. Working inside a family home can also mean that domestic workers identify with their employers and overlook their own rights.⁶⁰

When it comes to light that Tony is “the highest paid housekeeper on the eastern seaboard,” the housekeepers’ coffee klatch turns into a moment of union organizing, as the other neighborhood housekeepers prepare to demand Tony’s rate of pay along with comparable health insurance. The other housekeepers, all women, demand “equal pay for equal work,” highlighting the fact that a man’s labor in the home is better paid than a woman’s. Tony initially sees no reason to strike, as he is satisfied with his working conditions, but Angela insists that he support the other workers. The housekeepers’ demands are quickly met, and for a moment, Tony is no longer the highest paid housekeeper. But Angela gives him a raise so that he can maintain his title, a move further showing the higher value placed on men’s labor. Indeed, Tony’s method of household management seems exceptional in its melding of emotional and physical labor

⁶⁰ Cox, *The Servant Problem*, 126.

that is so sincere that it earns him a position as a permanent family member, regardless of his continuing status as a paid laborer.

“I Sort of Take Care of Them”: Emotional Labor on Charles in Charge

Just as Tony occupies a privileged position in Angela’s house, Charles’ position in the Powell family (for whom he works in the second through fifth seasons), would be a dream come true for a live-in domestic laborer. On the one hand, his wages appear to be low, based on his obsession with going over the contents of his bank account.⁶¹ On the other hand, Charles has privileges in the Powell household that most domestic laborers do not. As Bridget Anderson shows, “Whatever hours a live-in nanny and housekeeper is supposed to work, there is virtually no time when she can comfortably refuse to ‘help’ her employer with a household task.”⁶² Yet Charles has the luxury of refusing work for a multitude of reasons—too much homework, family obligations, even (regularly) dates—and he never faces disciplinary action or the termination of his employment for his refusals, just a few jokes at his expense. In the season two episode “Weekend Weary,” when Charles’ best friend Buddy tells Mr. Powell (the children’s grandfather and Mrs. Powell’s father-in-law) that Mrs. Powell gave Charles the weekend off, Mr. Powell retorts, “vacations are for people who work!”⁶³ Whereas most domestic laborers are not typically allowed to host guests, Buddy is a fixture of the Powell residence, even

⁶¹ “Where the Auction Is,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Three (First-run syndication, Apr. 20, 1988); “It’s a Blunderfull Life,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Four (First-run syndication, Aug. 22, 1989); “Let’s Quake a Deal,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Five (First-run syndication, May 11, 1990); “The Pickle Plot,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Three (First-run syndication, Feb. 10, 1988).

⁶² Bridget Anderson, “Just Another Job? The Commodification of Domestic Labor,” in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, eds. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (New York: Holt, 2002), 106.

⁶³ “Weekend Weary,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Apr. 25, 1987).

spending Christmas with them.⁶⁴ In contradistinction to Benson, who rarely leaves the governor's mansion, Charles has a new female conquest in nearly every episode, and he regularly enjoys nights out of the house in addition to his college classes. Despite the fact that Charles "lives downstairs," as the program's theme song relentlessly points out at the beginning of every episode, Charles takes on the role of head of household. He delegates the hard labor (in the episode "The Organization Man" he tells Buddy, "an organized executive knows how to delegate authority. I'll get someone else to do it"⁶⁵) to other members of the family, while he takes on the emotional labor of raising the children. This primary focus on child-rearing is common to men who were performing more domestic labor in the 1980s. As Hochschild's research shows,

Of all the time men spend working at home, more of it goes to child-care. That is, working wives spend relatively more time 'mothering the house'; husbands spend more time 'mothering' the children. Since most parents prefer to tend to their children than clean house, men do more of what they'd rather do.⁶⁶

Charles in Charge makes it clear that Charles enjoys helping the children with their problems—he professionalizes this service to a greater extent in the episode "Dear Charles" where he takes a temporary job as an advice columnist.⁶⁷ With Mrs. Powell's long work hours and Mr. Powell's curt manner, the children gravitate toward Charles in every episode for tender loving care and thoughtful advice. In fact, this absence of

⁶⁴ "Yule Laff," *Charles in Charge*, Season Three (First-run syndication, Dec. 24, 1987).

⁶⁵ "The Organization Man," *Charles in Charge*, Season Four (First-run syndication, May 24, 1989).

⁶⁶ Hochschild, *The Second Shift*, 9.

⁶⁷ "Dear Charles," *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Apr. 18, 1987).

parental figures during the Powell children's crucial teenage years (where crises regularly revolve around pseudo-sexual romantic entanglements) positions Charles' emotional labor as vitally important, lest Jamie act on her sexual urges,⁶⁸ Sarah lose confidence in her academic abilities,⁶⁹ or lest Adam become a pyromaniac.⁷⁰

Charles' household tasks rarely include cleaning or cooking, unless he is doing someone a favor, and his only consistent duty that marks him as hired help is a running joke where Mr. Powell barks at him, "doorbell!" every time the doorbell rings. In fact, minor characters often question Charles' employment, necessitating his explanation. In the second season episode "The Naked Truth," Charles explains to a prospective date: "this is the Powell family. I sort of take care of them."⁷¹ His hedging—that he "sort of" takes care of them—aptly describes the tenuous nature of his employment. A few episodes later, he tells Buddy's prospective date, "I do a little of everything" when she asks what he does in the house.⁷² He rarely appears to be truly necessary, yet many episodes insist that the family would fall apart without him. In the season three episode "Dutiful Dreamer," Mrs. Powell loses her job, and the family finds out their house is being sold.⁷³ Mr. Powell informs Charles that his employment is in jeopardy due to the confluence of these events. He labels Charles' position as a "live-in babysitter" a "luxury" that the family will have to forego. However, Charles proves he is not a luxury but a necessity by the end of the episode, when he calls his former employers, the

⁶⁸ "Big Bang," *Charles in Charge*, Season Four (First-run syndication, Aug. 22, 1989).

⁶⁹ "The Pickle Plot."

⁷⁰ "Buddy in Charge," *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Mar. 28, 1987).

⁷¹ "The Naked Truth," *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Jan. 10, 1987).

⁷² "Buddy in Charge."

⁷³ "Dutiful Dreamer," *Charles in Charge*, Season Three (First-run syndication, Mar. 28, 1988).

Pembroke, whose rented house the Powells sublet, and convinces them to buy the house and rent it to the Powells themselves. In this instance, Charles truly does a “little bit of everything.” He may be a luxury when it comes to babysitting duties, but he is integral in literally maintaining the home.

Still, Charles’ presence seems more and more unnecessary as the series progresses, and the Powell children grow up. In the last two seasons, middle daughter Sarah is about the same height as Charles and significantly taller than Buddy, and all three children are of an age where they would be more than capable of taking care of themselves (by the last season, oldest daughter Jamie is 17, and youngest son Adam has started high school). Because of this increasingly curious arrangement, episodes revolve around the importance of the labor Charles provides, primarily teaching the children to take care of themselves. This lesson would have been especially pertinent for families of the 1980s, where children were increasingly “unsupervised” after school. The fifth and final season premiere demonstrates Charles’ utility in this regard. In “Summer Together, Fall Apart,” the whole family (including Charles) comes home from a long vacation.⁷⁴ Charles raves to Buddy about what a great time they had, but each family member enters the house one by one complaining about what a horrible trip it was. When Mrs. Powell prepares to leave town for a two week-long business trip, Charles and Mr. Powell argue over whose rules the kids should follow. Mrs. Powell sides with Charles, hurting Mr. Powell’s feelings and causing him to “run away” from home, leaving Charles alone to deal with the kids. The kids complain to Charles that he makes too many rules, and they convince him to let each of them make one rule apiece. Adam’s rule, which structures

⁷⁴ “Summer Together, Fall Apart,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Five (First-run syndication, Nov. 15, 1989).

the rest of the episode, is that there should be no rules. Initially appalled by this suggestion, Charles embraces it, knowing it can only last so long. Indeed, the kids' separate prerogatives clash, and they run to Charles to settle their disagreements. To conclude the episode, Jamie begs Charles to make some rules, telling him "It's your job to bring us up right, so please do it." His hands-off approach has taught the Powell kids the need for some structure and order to avoid complete chaos.

Similarly, in the season three episode "Where the Auction Is," Charles avoids labor in order to teach the kids self-sufficiency.⁷⁵ Early in the episode, each family member requests some sort of labor from Charles. Adam asks him to clean his room, and Charles replies, "my job does not include cleaning your room." Jamie and Sarah ask him to make onion dip for their party and he replies, "sorry girls, I don't do windows or dips." Mr. Powell backs him up, telling Jamie and Sarah, "Charles is right, girls, onion dip is not in his job description." This response frustrates the girls, as Jamie exclaims in exasperation, "if that's true, what good is he?" before storming upstairs. Meanwhile, in order to get a date, Charles agrees to be a part of a sorority's "slave auction," and to his horror, the Powell children buy him. Jamie explains to Mr. Powell that they bought Charles because he refused to do chores for them. Hearing this, Charles is extremely hurt, and asks her, "so that's why you guys bought me, huh? Because you didn't think I do enough for you?" Charles' mother Lillian smooths things over, casually telling the kids about how she raised Charles to be "self-sufficient," and they realize that he was trying to do them the same favor. Though the children are seemingly grateful to Charles for his dedication to teaching them this valuable lesson, the episode concludes with an

⁷⁵ "Where the Auction Is."

insistence that Charles still does emotional, physical, and material labor. He satisfies the calls of each family member—helping Sarah with her algebra, gluing Adam’s thermos back together, giving Jamie dating advice, and cleaning the basement for Mr. Powell.

Charles in Charge makes Charles’ emotional labor all the more important in the Powell household by contrasting it with the gruff paternal authority figure of Mr. Powell, a retired marine. *Charles in Charge* sets up this contrast early in the second season, where Charles and Mr. Powell clash over how to handle Adam’s feud with a neighbor.⁷⁶ Whereas Charles encourages “diplomacy,” and suggests that Adam try to reason with his rival, Mr. Powell takes Adam in the kitchen to discuss a strategy of retaliation. In the season four episode “It’s a Blunderfull Life,” Charles feels compelled to save the children from the poor example Mr. Powell sets for them.⁷⁷ He begins to realize at the beginning of the episode that the children have picked up bad habits from Mr. Powell—Adam takes food to his bedroom, leaving a trail of crumbs and failing to return his plate; Jamie gives herself a manicure at the kitchen table, spilling polish just as Mr. Powell spills glue from his ship models; and Adam turns into a gambler, making bets on sporting events just like his grandfather. When Charles, Adam, and Mr. Powell patronize a newsstand, Charles talks Mr. Powell out of purchasing a lottery ticket, so as to discourage Adam from gambling. The newsstand cashier recognizes Charles’ moral authority, asking, “what are you, a customer or a TV evangelist?” This episode is not the first instance that Charles is held up as the familial conscience. In fact, the first episode of the second season, where

⁷⁶ “Feud for Thought,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Jan. 17, 1987).

⁷⁷ “It’s a Blunderfull Life.”

Charles is just getting acquainted with the Powells, establishes him in this role.⁷⁸ After counseling Sarah about her reluctance to date in the face of pressure from Jamie, Charles confronts Jamie, telling her that Sarah is “not ready yet, and that’s her decision.” Feigning disgust, Jamie retorts, “thank you, Michael Landon,” an allusion to Landon’s television series *Highway to Heaven* (NBC, 1984-1989) where he plays an angel who helps those in need. Charles’ emotional labor as moral compass of the Powell family places him squarely in the position of the Progressive Era middle-class housewife, whose duty was to guard the family from sin. By this logic, the housewife’s “soft” labor was considered more important than the hard labor that was often farmed out to servants. Indeed, Charles provides this labor largely in the absence of Mrs. Powell, who is completely absent from many episodes. L.S. Kim suggests that *Charles in Charge* is one of several programs in the 1980s representing “white male servants who take over the mother’s job (because there is doubt that she can do it).”⁷⁹ However, when Mrs. Powell does appear in episodes, she usually performs the menial labor that might be relegated to hired help. She cooks,⁸⁰ serves meals,⁸¹ does heavy cleaning⁸² and laundry,⁸³ and goes grocery shopping.⁸⁴ *Charles in Charge* marginalizes her “hard” domestic labor, as episodes revolve around Charles’ affective labor.

⁷⁸ “Amityville,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Jan. 3, 1987).

⁷⁹ L.S. Kim, “Maid in Color: The Figure of the Racialized Domestic in American Television,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997): 3.

⁸⁰ “Amityville,” “Mama Mia!,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Apr. 18, 1987).

⁸¹ “Buddy Comes to Dinner,” *Charles in Charge*, Season Two (First-run syndication, Feb. 14, 1987); “Mama Mia!”

⁸² “Buddy in Charge.”

⁸³ “Yule Laff.”

⁸⁴ “Dear Charles.”

While the bulk of Charles' labor in the Powell home is emotional, several episodes display his ability to juggle the myriad tasks necessary to keep the Powell house running smoothly. When Mrs. Powell and Mr. Powell leave for the day to pick up Mrs. Powell's husband, Captain Powell in "Piece of Cake," they provide Charles with a list of duties that need to be carried out before they return home.⁸⁵ He has to be home for the plumber to fix the sink, drop off and pick up dry cleaning, take Adam to his boy scout meeting, and clean the house. Charles attempts to delegate tasks, asking Sarah and Jamie to clean while he goes to the grocery store, but they instead want to bake their father's favorite cake. When Charles comes home from the grocery store, he finds Jamie ransacking the front closet, producing a huge mess while she frantically searches for the music box her father gave her. While Charles starts to pick up after her, she runs out of the house in a panic. Meanwhile, Adam comes downstairs dressed in his scout uniform and announces that Charles missed the plumber, who refused to fix the sink without an adult present to pay him. Charles and Adam walk into the kitchen to find a colossal mess left by Sarah and Jamie's ill-fated cake baking, which Sarah has abandoned in order to purchase frosting ingredients. Charles sends Adam off to purchase decorations as he tries to finish the cake. To make matters worse, as Jamie comes home in search of Charles' advice on how to make her father understand that she's not a little girl any more, Sarah returns and informs Charles that Adam has been caught shoplifting and is being detained at the market. After an exhausting chain of events (including an impromptu scout meeting at the Powell residence), Charles finally delegates enough chores to allow him to sit down and counsel Jamie, a moment that the episode frames as the most important.

⁸⁵ "Piece of Cake," *Charles in Charge*, Season Three (First-run syndication, Dec. 31, 1987).

Charles leaves the menial tasks—decorating, fixing the sink, and running to the dry cleaners—to others, while he helps Jamie conquer her emotional crisis.

Charles' skills are so in-demand that during the first season, he and Buddy try to set up a business providing other "Charleses" to families in the neighborhood.⁸⁶ Every character seems to know a family that is desperate to hire someone like Charles, so Buddy suggests that they train people that they can then stamp with the "Good Charles-keeping Seal of Approval," thus marking Charles' work in the home as somehow providing for a unique or exceptional mode of family governance. When Charles and Buddy tell the Pembrokes about their business venture, Charles says, "we feel like live-in family helpers are the wave of the future." Buddy confirms, noting that the prevalence of dual-career households necessitates outside help. Charles interviews various nightmare candidates, asking each a series of questions about dealing with and disciplining children. All of the candidates fail miserably, until a lone woman, Megan, remains. She gets past the questioning, which prompts Charles to bring on "the torture test," consisting of daughter Lila taking on the persona of a "hood," whom Megan dissuades by telling her that her all-black wardrobe is out of fashion, and son Jason convincing her to let him try out for the basketball team against his parents' wishes. Charles disapproves of Megan's handling of the situation and provides her (and the viewer) with specific rules by which to govern her relationship with the children she looks after: rule #1: What the parents say goes; rule #2: "There are no simple decisions"; rule #3: kids catch on quickly.

While Charles is always successful in solving familial problems, he cannot solve a momentary crisis involving one child's missing money. He accuses Jason, who denies

⁸⁶ "Charles 'R' Us," *Charles in Charge*, Season One (CBS, Feb. 13, 1985).

involvement, and Megan calls after Lila, whose sunglasses she recognizes as costing the same amount as the missing money. Here Megan proves the utility of feminine fashion sense in dealing with teenage girls. Her ability to quickly diffuse a dispute among children prompts Charles to name her his only graduate. This scene cuts to a medium close-up of Lila talking on the phone, telling the teenage daughter of the family Megan will work for “how to handle a live-in family helper.” Charles one-ups Lila, admitting to her that he has been telling Megan how to deal with a teenage daughter, an interesting turn of events since Charles lacked the “sensitivity” to deal with Lila in the prior scene. Still, this reinscribes Charles as the supreme family manager, mitigating any credibility he may have lost in the previous scene. Further, Charles’ seamless disciplining and caring for the children, presented in weekly lessons for the viewer in arranging her or his own family similarly, underscores Elayne Rapping’s comment that throughout the years the sitcom’s “scrubbed, well-functioning families have invaded our living rooms and challenged us to measure up. They have presented images of family unity and harmony to a nation deep in the throes of domestic chaos and trauma.”⁸⁷ *Charles in Charge* indeed presents a “well-functioning” family, however, Charles is a necessary component to that function. While *Charles in Charge* certainly does not undermine the cultural valuation of the nuclear family, it does suggest that many families need extra help in order to care for children.

Jill Pembroke, the mother on the first season of *Charles in Charge*, works as a newspaper writer. Unlike Angela’s primacy on *Who’s the Boss?*, *Charles in Charge*

⁸⁷ Elayne Rapping, *Media-tions: Forays into the Culture and Gender Wars* (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 149.

never takes place at Jill's office, and her specific work concerns rarely enter the storylines, although two grandparents suggest that she should take more of an active role in raising her children.⁸⁸ While Jill dismisses these attempted interventions, she herself bows to the pressure in the episode "Jill's Decision" where she decides not to take a promotion that would require extra hours, even though she can work from home.⁸⁹ Since Jill is a minor character, *Charles in Charge* does not devote much of the episode to her dilemma, and she seems to make her decision to turn down the promotion on the same day that she gets it. Jill's decision to sacrifice career for family plays into a tendency Alan Nadel traces, wherein,

most aspects of American life during the 1980s manifested a shrinking of women's power, authority, and real income. At the same time, [Susan] Faludi makes clear, a popular rhetoric emerged that suggested women were more successful and less happy *because* of their alleged advances.⁹⁰

Jill appears to agonize over her decision; however, Charles and the children do not seem to mind at all that she spends more time working. Meanwhile, Jill's husband Stan does not feel the same pull toward the family, and the episode never implies that he might want or need to spend more time with the children. Instead, the burden falls squarely on Charles. Through making childcare Jill's responsibility (with Charles there for help), *Charles in Charge* essentializes childcare as feminine. As Brown claims, "The *family* or

⁸⁸ "Home for the Holidays," *Charles in Charge*, Season One (CBS, Dec. 19, 1984); "Pressure from Grandma," *Charles in Charge*, Season One (CBS, Jan. 30, 1985); and "Meet Grandpa," *Charles in Charge*, Season One (CBS, Apr. 3, 1985).

⁸⁹ "Jill's Decision," *Charles in Charge*, Season One (CBS, Jan. 23, 1985).

⁹⁰ Alan Nadel, *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 88.

personal life is natural to woman and in some formulations *divinely ordained*; it is a domain governed by needs and affective ties, hence a domain of *collectivity*.”⁹¹ The “affective ties” that govern Jill do not in any way appear to govern her husband, who is “free” to roam the public sphere unfettered, and affective ties only govern Charles to the extent that he develops a fondness for the children whom he is paid to look after.

Even though *Charles in Charge* deals less with the mother’s career than does *Who’s the Boss?*, the fact that the Pembroke family needs (male) domestic help sets it apart from *Who’s the Boss?* in that the Pembrokes are a two-parent household. While *Who’s the Boss?* could easily rationalize Tony’s presence as Angela was a divorced mother looking for both a housekeeper and a “male role model” for her son,⁹² the choice of a male caregiver in *Charles in Charge* is never explicitly explained, and the Pembrokes’ need for Charles makes it clear that Jill is not expected to work the double shift all on her own. Further, the ability to employ extra help in a two-parent household has important class implications. As Elizabeth Traube points out,

In the absence of public provisioning of child care, [shared parenting] is a course available only to those with flexible work schedules and/or the financial means to hire domestic help. As it is currently practiced, shared parenting is predicated on the availability of cheap, primarily female labor and represents a privatized, middle-class solution to the problem of

⁹¹ Brown, *States of Injury*, 147. Original emphasis.

⁹² In the Pilot episode of *Who’s the Boss?*, when Mona convinces Angela to hire Tony, Mona reminds her that Jonathan’s child psychiatrist has insisted that he have a “male role model.” “Pilot,” *Who’s the Boss?*, Season One (ABC, Sept. 20, 1984).

expanding women's choices without reducing the care provided to dependents.⁹³

Here Traube makes clear the limitations of any liberal celebration of the politics of *Charles in Charge*—the program implies that upper middle-class women can “have it all” by simply exploiting the labor of broke college students. However, while Charles clearly labors in the home in order to make it through college, he also is quite obviously emotionally attached to the children.

Several episodes of *Charles in Charge*, *Benson*, and *Who's the Boss?* focus on Charles, Benson, or Tony turning down lucrative job offers to remain working in the home.⁹⁴ In essence, these episodes put Charles, Benson, and Tony in the (feminine) position of sacrificing career for family, with the important distinction that their labor in the family is paid. In the *Charles in Charge* episode “Pressure from Grandma,” Stan's mother Irene arrives and tries to push Charles out of the home and into the (public) workplace so that she can take over the role of household caretaker. Tensions between Irene and Charles began in an earlier episode, “Home for the Holidays” where she is appalled to find that the guest room (which she refers to as her room) is already occupied and that she must compete with Charles for the children's attention. She derides Stan for allowing an “outsider to raise [her] grandchildren.” In “Pressure from Grandma,” Irene takes matters into her own hands, luring Charles into working for her as a traveling salesman. With each subsequent trip she makes him travel a bit further, until he is so

⁹³ Traube, *Dreaming Identities*, 124-5.

⁹⁴ “Pressure from Grandma”; “Charles ‘R’ Us”; “The Pickle Plot”; “Taylor's Bid,” *Benson*, Season One (ABC, Dec. 13, 1979); “Angela's Ex (2)”; “Frankie and Tony are Lovers,” *Who's the Boss?*, Season Four (ABC, Sept. 22, 1987); “Yellow Submarine,” *Who's the Boss?*, Season Four (ABC, Dec. 15, 1987); “Inherit the Wine,” *Who's the Boss?*, Season Seven (ABC, Nov. 27, 1990); “Savor the Veal (3).”

successful that she tells him he should be traveling all along the east coast, thus allowing her to move into the Pembroke home. While Charles is off selling microwave pizza at Rutgers University, Irene babysits the children, who are uncomfortable with her rules and long for Charles. Irene suggests to the family that Charles will not be around the house much in the future, and when Charles returns, Jill inquires as to why he would be more interested in selling pizza when he has a job working for her. She asks about his financial situation and Charles discloses that he has only saved \$80 in the time he has lived with the Pembrokes. By contrast, he earned \$900 in one day selling pizza. As Irene pulls Charles aside to discuss his future, Jason, one of the Pembroke children, grabs Charles' arm. The camera pans left quickly, framing Charles and Irene in long shot, but stops abruptly and cuts to a close-up of Jason as he asks, "Charles, are you leaving us?" while gazing up expectantly at Charles, offscreen. The camera cuts back to Charles and Irene, framed in a medium two shot, as Charles explains that he is not interested in working for her. When he tells her, "I've already got a job, and I like it," the camera cuts to a long shot that includes all of the members of the Pembroke family, underscoring the importance of his managerial position in the home. In the second season premiere, Buddy tries to convince Charles not to work for his new employers, and rather to get an off-campus apartment with him, by pointing out "some children are going to have to grow up without your influence."⁹⁵ However, Charles of course opts to stay and influence the Powell children, performing the vital emotional labor that their mother is too busy to provide and for which their grandfather is ill-equipped.

⁹⁵ "Amityville."

In all likelihood, *Charles in Charge*, *Benson*, and *Who's the Boss?* did not spurn a craze of male domestic laborers, a lesson Charles himself already learned in the failure of his Charles 'R' Us venture. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels call attention to the unlikely scenario in *The Mommy Myth*, sarcastically noting that realistic depictions of the childcare crisis in the 1980s were obscured in favor of “fantasy hunks Tony (Tony Danza) in *Who's the Boss* and Charles (Scott Baio) of *Charles in Charge* who worked in that frequently-seen line of work, the male governess.”⁹⁶ Still, Mellencamp's idea of feminist fantasy is important in looking at *Charles in Charge* and *Who's the Boss?*, especially in the context of the neoconservative family politics of the 1980s. Jane Feuer captures the disparity between gender on film and on television in the 1980s, arguing, “If the emblematic films of the period represented a masculine fantasy of hard bodies and a hard political line (Jeffords 1994), television in the eighties, I will argue, was both more feminized and more ideologically complex.”⁹⁷ *Who's the Boss?*, *Benson*, and *Charles in Charge* certainly project ideological conflict, arguing that domestic labor should be valued, but only when performed by men. Still, these programs offer guidelines for family organization that do not require women to work the double shift—indeed, they show that work to be virtually impossible.

⁹⁶ Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, 263.

⁹⁷ Jane Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 2.

Conclusion

The 1980s saw a dramatic rise in the number and longevity of family sitcoms on network television. As Lara Descartes and Conrad Kottak claim,

Contrary to popular belief, it is the 1980s—not the 1950s—that best qualifies as the golden decade of the TV family. Not only did family-oriented programs dominate Nielsen's top ten, there was a revival of interest in family shows of the 1950s and 1960s, such as *Leave it to Beaver*. . . . The desire for and consumption of idealized media representations of traditional nuclear families increased in tandem with the subversion of that structure by socioeconomic fact.¹

In part because of the socioeconomic subversion of model family that television offered in the 1950s and 1960s, televisual models of family governance took a different shape in the 1980s. As chapter two showed, in an effort to attract professional women, sitcoms presented templates of masculinity that were more commensurate with domestic duties, alongside models of professional working wifedom and motherhood. The combination of these two figures produced a new model family, one whose members managed to more or less harmoniously combine fulfilling careers with parenting well-adjusted children.

Chapter four further examined the domestic shift in masculinity, exploring the possibilities sitcoms present for masculinized domestic labor and management. Chapter three explored the different solutions that sitcoms offered up to alleviate the day care crisis while eschewing state-sponsored or -supported childcare efforts. Taken together,

¹ Lara Descartes and Conrad P. Kottak, *Media and Middle Class Moms: Images and Realities of Work and Family* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 42.

Family Ties, Growing Pains, Silver Spoons, Mr. Belvedere, Kate & Allie, My Two Dads, Full House, Benson, Who's the Boss?, and Charles in Charge pedagogically orient viewers seeking solutions to familial problems such as childcare and the division of household labor.

Family sitcoms began to disappear from network schedules in the early to mid-1990s, boasting few hits in the Nielsen top ten after in 1994.² As Fox siphoned off viewers with the “edgier” families of *Married...with Children* (1987-1997) and *The Simpsons* (1989-), and the conception of the family audience splintered in favor of niche demographics, network family sitcoms in the 1990s centered around established stars and actors (Will Smith in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* [NBC, 1990-1996], Fran Drescher in *The Nanny* [CBS, 1993-1999], John Lithgow in *3rd Rock from the Sun* [NBC, 1996-2001]) and teen idols (Jonathan Taylor Thomas in *Home Improvement* [ABC, 1991-1999], Joey Lawrence in *Blossom* [ABC, 1991-1995], Rider Strong in *Boy Meets World* [ABC, 1993-2000]). While many of these programs contain similar emphases on domestic labor and childcare, they represent a departure from the liberal feminist fantasies of their 1980s counterparts. *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and *The Nanny* represent excessively wealthy families, *3rd Rock from the Sun* veers into more of science-fiction fantasy realm, *Blossom* and *Family Matters* derive most of their comedy from their dim-witted doofus characters (Joey and Six in the former and Steve Urkel in the latter), and *Boy Meets World* relegates the parents to the periphery. Moreover, the shift away from a general family audience precipitates the move toward the extremely popular friend-oriented sitcoms *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998) and *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004).

² See Appendix 3.

Despite the shift in primetime programming, family sitcoms remained a staple of afternoon syndicated programming, continuing to bring their lessons of family governance to a younger generation of children after school.

Indeed, in an ethnographic study of media consumption and family life, Descartes and Kottak found that 1980s family sitcoms had a powerful role in shaping middle-class family organization. They suggest, “The TV programs available during the 1980s played a prominent role in the enculturation of many of our Dexter [Michigan] informants.”³ Descartes and Kottak argue that media provide “scripts” after which families organize and model their everyday lives, both at work and at home. Particularly relevant to the liberal feminist fantasies put forth in 1980s sitcoms, Descartes and Kottak claim, “The media offer material with which to think through one’s own circumstances by contemplating alternatives, including some that are unavailable in the local setting.”⁴ Descartes and Kottak’s respondents (largely white, middle-class mothers) positively received the fantasies that 1980s sitcoms offered. They found that

Working mothers tended to enjoy fictional media that portrayed positive family situations involving dual-income families. One full time working mother recalled the show *Growing Pains*, saying, “I liked that show. That was a working family show in my opinion, and I liked the way they did it. She worked, he worked, everybody had a role, and they were all a family, no matter if they were working or not, they came home and it was a family.”

³ Descartes and Kottak, *Media and Middle-Class Moms*, 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

Programs like *Growing Pains* provided reassurance that the nuclear family, despite shifts in gender roles and socioeconomic changes, remained intact and that despite having to juggle two careers and children, “they came home and it was a family.”

Numerous feminist critics have taken issue with this impulse to maintain the nuclear family while encouraging a more domestically-oriented masculinity. Lynne Segal suggests that the figure of the domestic dad affords men even more power, “as it can be used to strengthen men’s control over women and children, in a society where men are already dominant socially, economically and politically.”⁵ Similarly, Estella Tincknell argues that “Rather than transforming or radicalizing masculinity, the new dad effectively extended the realm of male domination and patriarchal power, appropriating domestic space and expertise while resisting changes in the workplace.”⁶ While these critiques make valid and largely persuasive arguments about the limitations of the domesticated dad, sitcoms like *My Two Dads*, *Full House*, *Who’s the Boss?*, and *Growing Pains* represent a rupture in the longstanding cultural preference for “mother care,” a preference that, as Sonya Michel points out, “was reproduced, over and over again, as countless experts on childhood confronted the ‘problem’ of what to do with the children of working women.”⁷ Recognizing men as primary caretakers of children is an important step toward a more equitable workplace and more available childcare.⁸

⁵ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 51.

⁶ Estella Tincknell, *Mediating the Family: Gender, Culture and Representation* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 65.

⁷ Sonya Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 3.

⁸ Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Mary Vavrus argues that television news coverage of “Mr. Moms” in the 1990s does little to challenge the nuclear family, as they “naturalize the nuclear family and paternal dominance within it; they achieve, in essence, the domestication of patriarchy.”⁹ She further notes how the absence of gay fathers from this discourse shores up the nuclear family as staunchly heterosexual, regardless of who takes primary responsibility for child rearing. At the same time, Vavrus points out that the stay-at-home fathers being profiled often point to the 1983 film *Mr. Mom* as providing “a parenting manual for them; it helps them to discern how fathers might do what has traditionally been expected of mothers.”¹⁰ Just as *Growing Pains* presents a template for successful dual-career parenting, media iterations of the domesticated dad like *Mr. Mom* pedagogically orient fathers seeking models of masculinity that are commensurate with childcare and household responsibility.

Arlie Hochschild highlights the fact that these model fantasies of family life were ritualistically embedded in the daily routines of many of the dual-career households she studied. She observes, “After dinner, some families would sit together, mute but cozy, watching sitcoms in which *television* mothers, fathers, and children talked energetically to one another.”¹¹ Indeed, 1980s sitcoms were sold into syndication through promises that their fictional families would attract family viewers.¹² For example, a two-page

⁹ Mary Douglas Vavrus, “Domesticating Patriarchy: Hegemonic Masculinity and Television’s ‘Mr. Mom,’” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 3 (Sept. 2002): 353.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 209-210.

¹² Ad for *Mr. Belvedere*, *Variety*, Apr. 8, 1987, 48-49; Ad for *Family Ties*, *Variety*, Aug. 22, 1984, 86-7; Ad for *Webster*, *Variety*, Apr. 11, 1984, 50; Ad for *Benson*, *Variety*, Nov. 2, 1983, 91.

advertisement in *Variety* for *Family Ties* boasts its family appeal, promising “all-family viewing”:

Each member of the family is a strong character, a point of identity for key demographic audience segments. Still, the family is the comedic unit. Situations of uncommon humor and universal familiarity bind the Keatons together for appeal to men, women, teens and children. In a market of increasing fragmentation, Family Ties brings people together.¹³

The second page of the advertisement features a drawing of the Keaton family looking into a mirror, encouraging the reader to see him or herself in the place of his or her fictional familial counterpart. As the ad’s copy suggests, 1980s sitcoms provided a flattering mirror image of family life. Certainly the majority of the primetime television audience did not resemble the well-functioning, white, upper middle-class happy families they saw on their screens. But the programs repeatedly played out identifiable situations of domestic strife, parenting dilemmas, and work-related stress, with resolutions that offered up models of family governance and fantasies of reformed masculinity that would reinvigorate the “stalled revolution.”

¹³ Ad for *Family Ties*, *Variety*, Aug. 22, 1984, 86.

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“Play it Again, Jesse.” *Full House*. Season Five. ABC. Jan. 7, 1992.

“Playing with Fire.” *My Two Dads*. Season Two. NBC. Mar. 1, 1989.

“A Pox in Our House.” *Full House*. Season One. ABC. Jan. 29, 1988.

“The President’s Double.” *Benson*. Season One. ABC. Sept. 27, 1979.

“Pressure from Grandma.” *Charles in Charge*. Season One. CBS. Jan. 30, 1985.

“Protecting the President.” *Who’s the Boss?* Season One. ABC. Jan. 22, 1985.

“Quality Time.” *My Two Dads*. Season One. NBC. Dec. 6, 1987.

“The Real Thing (Part 2).” *Family Ties*. Season Four. NBC. Oct. 3, 1985.

“Remembrance of Things Past (Part 1).” *Family Ties*. Season Three. NBC. Mar. 28, 1985.

“Remembrance of Things Past (Part 2).” *Family Ties*. Season Three. NBC. Mar. 28, 1985.

“Requiem.” *Who’s the Boss?* Season One. ABC. Dec. 18, 1984.

“The Return of Grandma.” *Full House*. Season One. ABC. Oct. 9, 1987.

“Reunion.” *Mr. Belvedere*. Season Three. ABC. Nov. 21, 1986.

“Savor the Veal (1).” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Eight. ABC. Apr. 18, 1992.

“Savor the Veal (2).” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Eight. ABC. Apr. 25, 1992.

“Savor the Veal (3).” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Eight. ABC. Apr. 25, 1992.

“The Seavers vs. The Cleavers.” *Growing Pains*. Season One. ABC. Jan. 28, 1986.

“The Seven-Month Itch Part 1.” *Full House*. Season One. ABC. Mar. 11, 1988.

“The Seven-Month Itch Part 2.” *Full House*. Season One. ABC. Mar. 18, 1988.

“Sherry Baby.” *Family Ties*. Season One. NBC. Jan. 12, 1983.

“Slumber Party.” *Full House*. Season Four. ABC. Oct. 12, 1990.

“Some Enchanted Evening.” *Growing Pains*. Season Two. ABC. Jan. 27, 1987.

“Speed Trap.” *Family Ties*. Season Two. NBC. Nov. 9, 1983.

“Springsteen.” *Growing Pains*. Season One. ABC. Oct. 1, 1985.

“Story with a Twist.” *My Two Dads*. Season Two. NBC. Feb. 22, 1989.

“Stranger in the Night.” *Mr. Belvedere*. Season One. ABC. Mar. 15, 1985.

“Strike.” *Mr. Belvedere*. Season Two. ABC. Nov. 15, 1985.

“Superdad!” *Growing Pains*. Season One. ABC. Oct. 29, 1985.

“Suzanne Takes You Down.” *Family Ties*. Season One. NBC. Mar. 16, 1983.

“Sweet Lorraine.” *Family Ties*. Season Two. NBC. Nov. 16, 1983.

“Takin’ it to the Streets.” *Benson*. Season One. ABC. Mar. 27, 1980.

“Taylor’s Bid.” *Benson*. Season One. ABC. Dec. 13, 1979.

“Teacher’s Pet.” *Family Ties*. Season Four. NBC. Mar. 2, 1986.

“Thank God It’s Friday.” *Growing Pains*. Season Two. ABC. Feb. 10, 1987.

“This Year’s Model.” *Family Ties*. Season Two. NBC. Oct. 26, 1983.

“Three’s a Crowd.” *Silver Spoons*. Season One. NBC. Feb. 19, 1983.

“To Tony, With Love.” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Six. ABC. Nov. 28, 1989.

“Together We Stand.” *My Two Dads*. Season Two. NBC. Mar. 29, 1989.

“Tony Can You Spare a Dime?” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Eight. ABC. Jan. 4, 1992.

“Truth in Dating.” *Who’s the Boss?* Season One. ABC. Dec. 4, 1984.

“The Very Loud Family.” *Kate & Allie*. Season One. CBS. Mar. 26, 1984.

“The Visit.” *Family Ties*. Season Five. NBC. May 7, 1987.

“Weekend Weary.” *Charles in Charge*. Season Two. First-run syndication. Apr. 25, 1987.

“A Well-Kept Housekeeper.” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Eight. ABC. Nov. 2, 1991.

“Where the Auction Is.” *Charles in Charge*. Season Three. First-run syndication. Apr. 20, 1988.

“Who’s the Boss?” *Silver Spoons*. Season Five. First-run syndication. Sept. 15, 1986.

“Whose Night Is It Anyway?” *My Two Dads*. Season One. NBC. Nov. 1, 1987.

“Won’t You Go Home, Bob Danish?” *Silver Spoons*. Season One. NBC. Mar. 5, 1983.

“Working at It.” *Family Ties*. Season Two. NBC. May 10, 1984.

“Working Girls.” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Five. ABC. Apr. 11, 1989.

“Working Mothers.” *Full House*. Season Two. ABC. Feb. 3, 1989.

“The X Team.” *Silver Spoons*. Season One. NBC. Apr. 30, 1983.

“Yellow Submarine.” *Who’s the Boss?* Season Four. ABC. Dec. 15, 1987.

“You’ve Got a Friend.” *Family Ties*. Season Four. NBC. Dec. 19, 1985.

“Yule Laff.” *Charles in Charge*. Season Three. First-run syndication. Dec. 24, 1987.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Benson (ABC, 1979-1986)

Benson is a spin-off of *Soap* (ABC, 1977-1981), taking butler Benson and making him the manager of the governor's mansion. Benson regularly aids the bumbling single father governor in raising his daughter and in solving political and personal quandaries, all while overseeing the mansion's staff. Throughout the program's run, Benson works his way into more governmental affairs, including taking on the position of Lieutenant Governor, and in the final season, running for Governor against his erstwhile employer.

Charles in Charge (CBS, 1984-1985; first-run syndication 1987-1990)

In the first season of *Charles in Charge*, Charles is a college student working as a nanny/miscellaneous domestic laborer in the Pembroke household, a two-earner family with three children. The rest of the series ran in syndication and had Charles working in the same house with a different family—Navy wife Ellen's husband was stationed overseas, but her father-in-law and Charles helped her raise her three children.

Family Ties (NBC, 1982-1989)

The basic premise of *Family Ties* is a clash of generations—middle-aged hippies Elyse and Steve Keaton must reconcile their values with budding neocon son Alex P. Keaton and materialistic daughter Mallory. Younger daughter Jennifer was joined in the third season by a baby brother. Steve worked at a public television station, and Elyse worked as an architect, often from a desk in the kitchen.

Full House (ABC, 1987-1995)

Full House takes place in the home of widower Danny Tanner and his three young daughters. He has live-in help from his brother-in-law Jesse and best friend Joey, who exchange childcare and domestic labor for room and board. A running joke of the series is Danny's obsessive compulsive cleanliness.

Growing Pains (ABC, 1985-1992)

At the beginning of *Growing Pains*, Jason Seaver moves his psychiatry practice into the family den so that wife Maggie can go back to work after 15 years of being a stay-at-home mom. Son Mike is the popular troublemaker, daughter Carol the braniac, and youngest son Ben the requisite smart-aleck cute kid. The Seavers later had another daughter, Chrissy.

Kate & Allie (CBS, 1984-1989)

Kate & Allie tells the story of two best friends, both recently divorced, who move in together with their children. Kate works as a travel agent, and Allie stays home, maintaining the household and raising the children. The two friends try to support each other as they re-enter the dating scene and deal with the fallout from their divorces. Kate and Allie have disparate parenting techniques that often clash—Kate being very easy-going and permissive while Allie is tightly wound and strict.

Mr. Belvedere (ABC, 1985-1990)

The title character of *Mr. Belvedere* is the British housekeeper hired by the Owens family when wife Marsha goes to law school. He performs household chores, cooks, and provides wisdom to the three Owens children, and often their parents as well. Humor

often comes from Mr. Belvedere's interactions with husband George, a sportswriter who loves to mock Mr. Belvedere's British pedigree.

My Two Dads (NBC, 1987-1990)

In *My Two Dads*, Nicole Bradford's mother has died, and her will claims that she is not sure who Nicole's father is, thus she is to live with two possible candidates—former best friends Michael and Joey, who had a falling out after they both fell in love with Nicole's mother. Much of the comedy comes from the clash between the two dads—Michael is a conservative financial advisor and Joey is an womanizing artist. Nicole and her two dads live together in Joey's loft, as Michael and Joey try to reconcile their ideas about parenting.

Silver Spoons (NBC, 1982-1987)

Silver Spoons begins with immature millionaire Edward Stratton meeting a child who claims to be his son. Ricky Stratton comes to live with his father after his mother has put him in military school. Ricky must teach his father how to be a parent, and Edward has to teach precocious Ricky to take life less seriously. Edward's personal assistant Kate acts as a mother figure to Ricky, and eventually she and Edward get married.

Who's the Boss? (ABC, 1984-1992)

In *Who's the Boss?*, Tony Micelli comes to work as advertising executive Angela Bower's housekeeper. Tony is a widower with a daughter, Samantha, and Angela is divorced with a son, Jonathan. Angela comes to serve as a mother for Samantha, and Tony a father for Jonathan. Rounding out the family is Angela's mother, Mona, who

often acts as the voice of reason and mediates family disputes. A driving force of the program's narrative is the slowly developing romance between Tony and Angela, which finally comes to fruition in the last two seasons of the show.

Appendix 2: Family Sitcoms 1970-1998

year	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Total sitcoms	24	20	18	21	15	22	25	25	23	26
Family sitcoms	12	10	5	3	3	4	4	3	4	6
Percent family sitcoms	50%	50%	28%	14%	20%	18%	16%	12%	17%	23%

year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987*	1988*	1989*
Total sitcoms	24	28	28	24	21	18	28	35	33	40
Family sitcoms	4	9	9	10	13	14	15	15	15	17
Percent family sitcoms	17%	32%	32%	42%	62%	78%	54%	43%	45%	43%

*Fox broadcast original programming Sat.-Sun. in 1987 and 1988, and Sat.-Mon. in 1989.

year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Total sitcoms	44	44	43	46	40	59	62	62	53
Family sitcoms	19	21	15	21	17	23	22	22	17
Percent family sitcoms	43%	48%	35%	46%	43%	39%	35%	35%	32%

Fox broadcasts original programming Thurs.-Mon. from 1990-1992, and began broadcasting every night in 1993. In 1995, WB broadcasts original programming Sun. and Wed., and UPN broadcasts original programming Mon.-Wed. From 1996-1997, WB broadcasts Sun., Mon., and Wed. and UPN broadcasts Mon.-Wed. In 1998, WB broadcasts Sun.-Thurs., and UPN broadcasts Mon.-Fri.

Appendix 3: Family sitcoms in the ratings

1970

19. *My Three Sons*
20. *The Doris Day Show*

1971

16. *The Partridge Family*
23. *The Doris Day Show*

1972

19. *The Partridge Family*

1973

17. *Good Times*

1974

7. *Good Times*

1975

6. *Phyllis*
12. *One Day at a Time*
24. *Good Times*

1976

8. *One Day at a Time*
26. *Good Times*

1977

10. *One Day at a Time*

1978

18. *One Day at a Time*
27. *Diff'rent Strokes*

1979

10. *One Day at a Time*
23. *Benson*
26. *Diff'rent Strokes*

1980

11. *One Day at a Time*
17. *Diff'rent Strokes*

1981

10. *One Day at a Time*

1982

16. *One Day at a Time*

1983

8. *Kate & Allie*
25. *Webster*

1984

3. *The Cosby Show*
5. *Family Ties*
17. *Kate & Allie*

1985

1. *The Cosby Show*
2. *Family Ties*
10. *Who's the Boss?*
14. *Kate & Allie*
17. *Growing Pains*

1986

1. *The Cosby Show*
2. *Family Ties*
8. *Growing Pains*
10. *Who's the Boss?*
19. *Kate & Allie*
21. *My Sister Sam*
28. *Alf*

1987

1. *The Cosby Show*
5. *Growing Pains*
6. *Who's the Boss?*
10. *Alf*

10. *The Wonder Years*
17. *Family Ties*
20. *My Two Dads*
20. *Valerie's Family*
28. *Day by Day*

1988

1. *The Cosby Show*
2. *Roseanne*
7. *Who's the Boss?*
13. *Growing Pains*
15. *Alf*
22. *The Wonder Years*

1989

1. *The Cosby Show*
1. *Roseanne*
8. *The Wonder Years*
12. *Who's the Boss?*
21. *Growing Pains*
22. *Full House*
28. *The Simpsons*

1990

3. *Roseanne*
5. *The Cosby Show*
14. *Full House*
15. *Family Matters*
19. *Who's the Boss?*
21. *Major Dad*
27. *Growing Pains*
27. *Baby Talk*
30. *The Wonder Years*

1991

2. *Roseanne*
4. *Home Improvement*
7. *Full House*
9. *Major Dad*

18. *The Cosby Show*
22. *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*
27. *Family Matters*

1992

2. *Roseanne*
3. *Home Improvement*
10. *Full House*
16. *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*
26. *Blossom*
30. *The Simpsons*

1993

2. *Home Improvement*
4. *Roseanne*
5. *Grace Under Fire*
16. *Full House*
21. *Dave's World*
21. *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*
30. *Family Matters*

1994

3. *Home Improvement*
4. *Grace Under Fire*
10. *Roseanne*
20. *Me and the Boys*
21. *Dave's World*
24. *The Nanny*
25. *Full House*

1995

7. *Home Improvement*
13. *Grace Under Fire*
16. *The Nanny*
16. *Roseanne*
22. *3rd Rock from the Sun*

1996

9. *Home Improvement*

27. *3rd Rock from the Sun*

1997

10. *Home Improvement*
23. *King of the Hill*
28. *Hiller and Diller*
30. *Everybody Loves Raymond*
30. *The Simpsons*

1998

5. *Jesse*
10. *Home Improvement*
11. *Everybody Loves Raymond*

Appendix 4: Prime-Time Family Sitcom Scheduling

1980

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS				<i>One Day at a Time</i>				
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC					<i>Diff'rent Strokes</i>			

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Benson</i>					
CBS								
NBC								

1981

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS				<i>One Day at a Time</i>				
NBC								

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS				<i>Two of Us</i>				
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								

CBS								
NBC						<i>Love, Sidney</i>		

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC				<i>Best of the West</i>				
CBS								
NBC					<i>Diff'rent Strokes</i>	<i>Gimme a Break</i>		

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Benson</i>					
CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Maggie</i>					
CBS								
NBC								

1982

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS						<i>One Day at a Time</i>		
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC						<i>Family Ties</i>		

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC						<i>It Takes</i>		

						<i>Two</i>		
CBS								
NBC								

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Benson</i>					
CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>Diff'rent Strokes</i>	<i>Silver Spoons</i>	<i>Gimme a Break</i>	<i>Love, Sidney</i>		

1983

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS				<i>One Day at a Time</i>				
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC						<i>Family Ties</i>		

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC						<i>It's Not Easy</i>		
CBS								
NBC			<i>Gimme a Break</i>					

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Benson</i>	<i>Webster</i>				
CBS								
NBC				<i>Jennifer Slept Here</i>				

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>Diff'rent Strokes</i>	<i>Silver Spoons</i>				

1984

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC	<i>Silver Spoons</i>	<i>Punky Brewster</i>						

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS					<i>Kate & Allie</i>			
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS			<i>Charles in Charge</i>					
NBC						<i>It's Your Move</i>		

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC				<i>Who's</i>				

				<i>the Boss?</i>				
CBS								
NBC			<i>The Cosby Show</i>	<i>Family Ties</i>				

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Benson</i>	<i>Webster</i>				
CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>Diff'rent Strokes</i>	<i>Gimme a Break</i>				

1985

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC	<i>Punky Brewster</i>	<i>Silver Spoons</i>						

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS					<i>Kate & Allie</i>			
NBC								

Tuesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Who's the Boss?</i>	<i>Growing Pains</i>				
CBS								
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS					<i>Charlie & Company</i>			
NBC								

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>The Cosby Show</i>	<i>Family Ties</i>				

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Webster</i>	<i>Mr. Belvedere</i>	<i>Diff'rent Strokes</i>	<i>Benson</i>		
CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>Gimme a Break</i>					

1986

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC				<i>Valerie</i>				

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS			<i>Kate & Allie</i>	<i>My Sister</i>				

				<i>Sam</i>				
NBC			<i>Alf</i>					

Tuesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Who's the Boss?</i>	<i>Growing Pains</i>				
CBS								
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS			<i>Together We Stand</i>					
NBC					<i>Gimme a Break</i>	<i>You Again</i>		

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>The Cosby Show</i>	<i>Family Ties</i>				

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Webster</i>	<i>Mr. Belvedere</i>				
CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC				<i>The Ellen Burstyn Show</i>				
CBS								

NBC								
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1987

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>Family Ties</i>	<i>My Two Dads</i>				
Fox				<i>Married with Children</i>				

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS				<i>Kate & Allie</i>				
NBC			<i>Alf</i>	<i>Valerie's Family</i>				

Tuesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Who's the Boss?</i>	<i>Growing Pains</i>				
CBS								
NBC								

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC				<i>The Charmings</i>				
CBS								
NBC			<i>The Cosby Show</i>					

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Full House</i>	<i>I Married Dora</i>				

CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS			<i>My Sister Sam</i>					
NBC								
Fox			<i>Mr. President</i>					

1988

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>Family Ties</i>	<i>Day by Day</i>				
Fox				<i>Married with Children</i>				

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>Alf</i>	<i>The Hogan Family</i>				

Tuesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Who's the Boss?</i>	<i>Roseanne</i>				
CBS								
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Growing Pains</i>		<i>The Wonder</i>			

					<i>Years</i>			
CBS				<i>Annie McGuire</i>				
NBC						<i>Baby Boom</i>		

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>The Cosby Show</i>					

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC				<i>Full House</i>	<i>Mr. Belvedere</i>			
CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC				<i>Raising Miranda</i>				
Fox								

1989

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Free Spirit</i>					
CBS								
NBC			<i>Sister Kate</i>	<i>My Two Dads</i>				
Fox					<i>Married with Children</i>			

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS			<i>Major Dad</i>	<i>People Next Door</i>				
NBC			<i>Alf</i>	<i>The Hogan Family</i>				

Tuesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Who's the Boss?</i>	<i>The Wonder Years</i>	<i>Roseanne</i>	<i>Chicken Soup</i>		
CBS								
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Growing Pains</i>					
CBS								
NBC								

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>The Cosby Show</i>					

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Full House</i>	<i>Family Matters</i>				
CBS								
NBC								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Mr. Belvedere</i>					

CBS								
NBC								
Fox								

1990

Sunday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS								
NBC								
Fox	<i>True Colors</i>				<i>Married with Children</i>			

Monday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS			<i>Uncle Buck</i>	<i>Major Dad</i>				
NBC			<i>Fresh Prince of Bel Air</i>					
Fox								

Tuesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Who's the Boss?</i>		<i>Roseanne</i>			
CBS								
NBC								

Wednesday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>The Wonder Years</i>	<i>Growing Pains</i>				
CBS			<i>Lenny</i>					
NBC								

Thursday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
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ABC								
CBS								
NBC			<i>The Cosby Show</i>					
Fox			<i>The Simpsons</i>					

Friday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC			<i>Full House</i>	<i>Family Matters</i>				
CBS								
NBC								
Fox								

Saturday

	7PM	7:30PM	8PM	8:30PM	9PM	9:30PM	10PM	10:30PM
ABC								
CBS			<i>Family Man</i>	<i>The Hogan Family</i>				
NBC				<i>Working It Out</i>				<i>American Dreamer</i>
Fox								