Working Paper No. 2
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November 1990

Maryland Focus Group Report on Family Time[1]

Institute for American Values

[1] For sessions held Tuesday, September l8, l990,6:00 and 8:00 p.m. at Chesapeake Surveys, 305 W. Chesapeake Avenue, Towson, MD

Table of Contents

Introduction

On September 18, 1990, the *Commission on the Family in America* convened 21 parents from the Baltimore area for a discussion of family time and other issues of family life. These parents, all unrelated, each had at least one child at home under the age of eleven. (For a full discussion of the recruitment methodology and profile, see Section Two: Design and Methodology.)

Our inquiry had three goals. The first was to generate field research for a paper by William Mattox on how families with children allocate and manage their time between home and work. The Mattox paper will be one of several papers prepared for the first meeting of the Commission.

The second goal was to begin the process of question development for the American Family Panel research.

Focus group research can identify issues and concerns that might not surface in conventional survey research. For example, in these Maryland focus groups, at least two areas of intense interest and concern came as surprises. We had not discussed either in our conceptual session before the discussions, nor did we raise either as questions in the discussions themselves. They emerged independently in both groups during the course of the two-hour sessions.

Focus groups also capture the language of everyday life -- its figures of speech, colloquial expressions, jokes, common sense, and illogic. Because they can enrich and illuminate more quantitative findings, the qualitative data gathered through focus group research is valuable for this reason alone. However, our aim in conducting focus group research goes well beyond simply enhancing quantitative data. We are interested not only in what people say but how they say it. We believe that the language of everyday life provides important clues as to how families order their experience and constitute their social and moral universe.

Focus groups complement survey research in a third way. They prompt conversations. Obviously, focus group discussions are not conversations in the genuine sense. They are mediated, structured, and therefore, in a sense, manufactured conversations. However, they do go beyond the private exchange between a single interviewer and a single respondent. They are, quite literally, more public. They capture what people are willing and able to say in front of others and therefore provide valuable insights into what Robert Bellah terms the public argument. In this sense, focus group discussions simulate public debate.

Our third goal was to test a possible method for recruiting prospective American Family Panel members. At the end of the discussions, seventeen of the twenty-one participants indicated that they would be interested in participating in the American Family Panel.

The fourth goal was to generate original research for a forthcoming book on the status and future of the American family.

This paper reports on the results of the Maryland discussions. It is divided into two parts. The first section describes our methodological approach. The second section discusses dominant themes.

Design and Methodology

We hired Chesapeake Surveys, a field research organization located in Towson, Maryland, to select our focus group participants. We asked the firm to assemble two groups of parents. Each group was to include representatives from several different family types. The field researchers developed a screening questionnaire based on the following criteria: (l) mothers and fathers with children under eleven and at least one child over two living at home; (2) parents from two-income, one-and-a-half, and one-income families with family income levels between $25-$45,000 for two-parent families, $l6,000+up for single-parent families; (3) married and single parents; (4) black or Hispanic parents, including at least one per group from two-parent family households. All participants had to be unrelated.

The company contacted prospects by phone, using random digit dialing in the Baltimore metropolitan area. They conducted a brief screening interview over the phone (Appendix A) and invited individuals who fit the profile to attend the group discussion. As a follow-up, they sent a letter confirming the time and date of the meeting to prospective participants. Participants received a $35 honorium when they arrived at the interview site. (One recruit was paid and sent away because we had filled the quota for his family type.)

The recruiting yielded the following results:
For the 6:00 p.m. group, eleven participants, including:

1 Earner/Married	2 Earners/Married	1.5 Earners/Married	Single
2 female, 1 male	1 female, 1 male	2 female, 3 male	1 female

The above participants included two black mothers, one from a one-earner married

parent household and one from a two-earner married-parent household.

In the 8:00 p.m. group, there were ten participants, including:

1 Earner/Married	2 Earners/Married	1.5 Earners/Married	Single
2 male	1 female, 1 male	3 female, 1 male	2 female

The above participants included one black father from a married-parent two-earner household and one black mother separated and living with children.

Overall, family incomes were higher than the national median of $31,900.[2] For the 6:00 p.m. group, the most frequently reported family income for married parents was $30-40,000; for the 8:00 p.m. group, the most frequently reported income was $50,000+ for married parents.

The discussions were held in an observation room with tape-recording facilities. Participants filled out a brief questionnaire that was administered before the group process began. Questionnaire results were then tabulated. (Appendix B.) Participants were also asked to complete a Time Use Report. This form, designed by William Mattox, aims at establishing the pattern of time allocation for an entire family during a representative workday. The time report is one family member's report of where all family members are likely to be at a particular time during a representative workday. (Appendix C.)

The study guide (Appendix D) was developed by William Mattox, David Blankenhorn, and Barbara Whitehead in a morning-long conceptual session. The study guide is intended as a loose outline for discussion rather than a set of questions that are to be formally administered. It is designed to permit follow-up and probing on key questions and to promote rather than inhibit conversation among the participants. Consequently, although the questions were roughly the same and fell roughly into the same sequence, there was some variation between the two groups in subject matter and length of time spent on individual questions. The study guide includes three exhibits: a l958 photograph of a family at the beach; the audio transcript for a videotaped Goodyear television commerical that was shown to the group; and a set of statements reflecting different attitudes or clusters of attitudes.

Barbara Whitehead conducted both sessions. Typed transcripts of the taped discussions are available for more detailed review.

Characteristics of Participants

Measured by marital status, mobility, home ownership, and geographic proximity to

[2] 1988 Census Bureau figures.

kin, this appears to be a stable and fairly traditional group of parents.

Eighteen of the 21 parents are married; l3 report that their current marriage is their first. The overwhelming majority have lived in Baltimore for 30 or more years, with l3 residing in the Baltimore area their entire lives.

Parents report being geographically close to relatives. More than half say that their nearest relative is within a drive of l5 minutes or less. Although we didn't ask, several parents indicated that relatives provide important forms of financial assistance: jobs, housing, used cars.

Fifteen say they are homeowners. Among the six non-homeowners, four are divorced, separated, or not in first marriages. Among homeowners, one is divorced -- she lives in the house she grew up in -- and two are not in first marriages. (It might be interesting to look more systematically at the relationship between home ownership and marital status among men to see if there is a lower rate of home ownership among men in second or third marriages.)

Dominant Themes

Seven dominant themes emerged from the discussions of the focus groups: family time, childcare arrangements, the plight of the single parent, designer clothes and sneakers, the climate of fear, the 1950s family and family decline, and necessity versus choice.

Family Time

A significant majority of participants report relatively short commutes to work (under one hour), regular work hours, and workweeks of 40 hours or less. The notable exceptions include a single mother who reports working 68 hours a week on average and a married father in a single-earner family who works 70 hours a week. In both cases, these parents also say they have little personal control over their time and put in many extra hours during emergencies and seasonal rushes.

As one measure of family togetherness, we asked about the frequency with which families shared the evening meal. Most report eating more than three evening meals together as an entire family, although not all the meals are eaten at home or cooked at home. The single-earner families tend to share other meals as well; one such family got up each morning at six to read and talk together for 30 minutes at breakfast. In the married families where both parents work, meal preparation falls to

the parent who gets home first. Men are as likely as women to cook, or to begin cooking, the evening meal.

It is possible to group families on a scale of time sufficiency with the high end representing a time surplus and the low end representing a time deficit. At the high end of the time sufficiency scale, we can place the single-earner family with a stay-at-home mother and a working father who works 40 hours a week or less. Asked to rate their satisfaction with their routines and the amount of time they had with their children, these parents indicate satisfaction. They also tend to have the simplest and most regular family schedules.

At the low end of the time sufficiency scale, we find single mothers. One single mother set the record for the most hours worked -- 84 hours a week at peak periods during the year -- and the other single mother, though reporting a 30-hour-work week, says she has to spend many evenings at home preparing projects and activities for her preschool class. These mothers indicate strong dissatisfaction with the amount of time available to spend with their children.

Also registering intense dissatisfaction with the time available for children are members of single-earner families with a "workaholic" father (i.e., more than a 40-hour work week). The father with the 70-hour, highly unpredictable weekly work schedule said he resents spending so much time away from home:

"I've missed a lot of them growing up because my schedule's been like this for ten years."

Two stay-at-home mothers, both with husbands who work long hours, including nights and weekends, echo this sentiment, saying that their husbands are missing out on important events in their children's lives. However, these parents are less concerned than the single parents about the effect on the children, because the mother is available for the children even if the father is not.

The one-and-a-half- or two-earner families fall within the large middle area between the two poles. In general, these parents say they don't have enough time with their children, although their dissatisfaction is not quite as intense as the single mothers' or the "workaholic" fathers'.

Women, including single mothers, married mothers with home-based businesses, and married mothers who work full-time, say they are frequently tired. One mother, a full-time worker with three children, describes her evening routine:

"On Mondays, usually between 5:30 and 6 o'clock, I take my oldest daughter . . . with me on Bible study and we will come back about 7 o'clock, my husband will be

there. He will usually go out if he has some appointments. Then I would bathe the children [laugh], give them a snack, of course, before it's time to go to bed. About 8:30 or something, they're finally quieting down so that they can go to bed. And then, you know, they'll say their prayers and go to bed. And then by that time . . . um, I never do this ahead of time, but I'm always getting everything for the next day, like ironing and picking up their clothes, making their lunches and getting my stuff together. By the time I look up it's almost ll o'clock. And then I'm pooped! [laugh]"

As much as they complain about an absolute deficiency of time, parents complain about the hurried pace and fragmented schedules that their work responsibilities impose. Several parents say that "life in the fast lane" is one of the major trends in family life today. The quickened pace of family life, they say, leads to overreliance on electronic games and media, contributing to a decline in parent-child communication:

". . . there was more conversation that went on in my house growing up. But in place of the communication, you have the Nintendo and have the VCR and you've got cable . . "

According to these parents, family schedules are highly individualized. Asked to compare their own routines with other families in the neighborhood, parents say there are few common patterns:

A stay-at-home mother: "There's about one or two other women on the whole long street that I live that stay home with their children, so I'm pretty different from most of the families in my neighborhood."

A working father with a part-time working wife: "The rest of the neighborhood, I think each and every one is independent of the other. Of course there's, uh, . . . in my neighborhood there's a mixture of younger couples and elderly couples so you go from one side of the spectrum to the other."

Asked what they would do with a little extra time, parents say they'd like to spend it with the children or with each other. Some representative remarks:

"I think I'd like to work at home. That way I could be with my kid more." (Winthrop, computer technician, single-earner family)

". . . I would stay home and make sure that my husband had every weekend off, get involved with PTA and stuff like that with the kids ..." (Judy, loan servicing clerk, dual-earner family)

"I wish my wife's job was a more scheduled routine kind of thing as opposed to this

once-a-week finding out what hours she's working every day." (David, lumberyard maintenance supervisor, one-and-a-half earner family)

Most parents see a relationship between time spent with children and their children's moral development:

"I think they [the children] need [their parents] in times when . . . where you're not doing anything. They need to see you, how you, what you do during the day. They need to learn your values by being with you."

". . . I talk to my daughter a lot because in school she's under a lot of peer pressure for a lot of different things. At nine years old, they're already talking about sex in school. So it's very, very important to me, even with my schedule, I make sure that I sit down and I ask her what she thinks . . ."

The forthcoming Mattox paper will provide a more complete consideration of family time patterns and a detailed analysis of family time reports filled out by the parents. (Appendix C.)

Childcare Arrangements

Among these families, there is a strong common element in childcare arrangements. They rely on the other parent, relatives, or neighbors for childcare. Among the two groups, only one two-earner family uses nonrelative daycare exclusively -- and in that case it is a "daycare mother." Even the single mother who works longer hours than any other person (sometimes 84 hours a week) combines daycare with relative care, placing her son in daycare from the end of school until 9 p.m. when her mother-in-law picks up the ten-year-old boy and puts him to bed. The mother-in-law stays with the boy and then leaves at midnight. The child sleeps in the house with his 94-year-old great-great-grandmother until his mother gets home. Interestingly, in the cases of both a divorced and a separated mother, the paternal grandmother and the separated spouse provide significant childcare assistance.

It is difficult to assign the families' childcare arrangements to a single fixed category. Each family designs its own way of caring for the children, and childcare usually combines a variety of different elements -- night, shift, or weekend work; seasonal work; tag-team arrangements between parents; care by relatives. Several mothers do paid work at home in order to care for their own children.

To illustrate the variety of arrangements, here are just three descriptions:

A full-time maintenance supervisor in a lumberyard with two children, five and eight, works days while his wife works full-time as a clerk at Caldor at nights. His

mother-in-law, who lives with them, is cared for by a health aide who also watches the children until he gets home in the evening. He fixes supper and puts the kids to bed.

A mother of two, ages one and six, cares for another child five hours a day in her home and does typing at home for her brother who is a doctor. Her husband works for a leasing firm.

A loan servicing clerk and mother of three works full-time as does her husband, a salesman who works on commission for a cemetery company. During the day, the paternal grandfather takes care of the younger children while the oldest child goes to school. According to the mother, the children's father "pretty much sets his own schedule so he'll pick them up (from the grandfather's house) until I get home and then he'll go out and work in the evenings."

Another mother, who currently does not work outside the home but did so for a number of years, says, with visible pride:

"I'm always there to put her [her daughter] in school, even when I worked. I always worked a schedule that allowed me to put her on the school bus, and then I always made sure that he [her husband] was home to get her off the bus. So really, the only time we've ever had to use babysitters was one time for like an hour after school with one job I had. But other than that, we don't have to use one . . . I don't trust people with my child . . . only my mother and she's too far away. [laugh]"

The Plight of the Single Parent

Although there were only three single parents (two divorced, one separated) in the groups, they attracted our attention for several reasons.

We thought that the single mothers might be reticent in groups where married parents made up the majority. On the contrary, the single mothers were dominant voices. They spoke up frequently, and their comments were distinctively direct and candid, even blunt.

Secondly, their circumstances were objectively harsher than those of the married parents. Compared to married parents, they have less money and less time. Their incomes are less than half the incomes most frequently reported for the married parent families. They also report having far less time with their children. In the most dramatic case, one single mother leaves home at 7:30 in the morning before her l0-year-old son goes off to school and returns late at night, sometimes as late as 3 am. She eats one meal a week with her child. She expresses grief and anxiety at spending so little time with her son:

"I only see my son . . . 90 percent of the time through the year maybe two, three days a week without him going to babysitters, childcare and school. So, you know, being a single parent you have to do these things. It's hard to run a household and do things like that without working to death. And, you know, it's hard for a single parent, very hard."

Several other times, she refers to her bone-weariness, being "tired and washed out" or "worked out."

Another single mother, a pre-school teacher, talks about how her job prevents her from attending her own daughter's school events:

"There have been times when our schedules totally conflict. Like when her closing program and my kids' closing program were the same day. You know, and I have to ask the kindergarten teacher if we could switch times so that I could go to her program in the morning and to my kids' in the afternoon. So I never go to open house -- can't go to PTA meetings -- there isn't really a great need for me to be at a [preschool] PTA meeting. You know, there's more of a need for me to be at my child's."

Finally, far from being proponents of single-parenthood, these single mothers are the most vehement and outspoken critics of single-parent status. The mother with the 84-hour workweek says she is remarrying her son's father because

"I'm tired of working now. I'm darned if I'm going to work when I'm 85 years old. That's why I want to get back with my husband. I mean, I hate to say this in front of everybody here, but it's like, you know, I don't even care for him that much . . . but it's another income . . ."

Her dream is to become a stay-at-home mother and housewife. Asked how she would change her daily schedule if she could, she says:

"I would like to spend more time with my son hugging him and just doing anything where we could be together. Because, I mean, I know in his behavior . . . I see that there is a lot of hate and confusion and upset in him, and that's just one thing I would like to do is hold my child."

Designer Labels, "Reeboks" and "LA Gear"

In both groups, parents themselves introduced the issue of children's clothing and sneakers. This was an emotionally intense discussion where everyone had something to say and everyone tried to talk at once.

Parents express anger and resentment at pressure by media and peer groups to buy designer-label clothes and shoes.

"My son came home -- he's in first grade -- and said somebody told him his clothes were dorky or whatever, and you know he had on just jeans and a polo shirt or something. He looked fine. And so we talked about it. Oh, he said, my clothes aren't cool, Mom. And I said well, what does cool mean? And he didn't know but he knew that was something he wanted to be."

"Cartoon time on Saturday morning, the kid shows advertise all this stuff. The same way they do at Christmas time, these toys and things like that. And ... oh Mom, I want that! Gee, I sure would like to have that! Them kids got that! But what they're not looking at is what those things cost. Okay? And that's where it's at."

Several parents say this pressure begins as early as age four or five; one mother claims her child became brand-sensitive at age two.

Parents do not agree on how to deal with this pressure. A number of parents say their response is simply to refuse to give in to their children's demands.

" . . . when we go to the store, they say, I want you to buy me [this] and I want this. I say, what you want, you don't get, and we walk out of the store . . . "

Others think that school uniforms help solve the problem. Apparently, the Baltimore public schools have just introduced school uniforms, and these parents like the idea.

Still others seem to feel that these consumer goods are "extras" that they can enjoy buying. One mother, currently separated, said she had just paid $130 for shoes for her 4-year-old and 6-year-old.

Although the parents say that television influences their children's brand consciousness, no one proposed removing the television from the home. Moreover, a survey of the 8:00 p.m. group showed that everyone in the group owns a television set and a VCR. However, one at-home mother says she sets strict controls on viewing:

"I mean, we have a television, one televison. It's in one room and if we're all going to watch it, then we each sit down and we pick what we're going to watch together and watch for an hour and it goes off. And that's it. I have all those things [VCR, TV, microwave, computers] . . . But if you're responsible with those things, I think you can use your time to suit your children."

The Climate of Fear

Parents told us that they are afraid to let their children out of their sight. In some cases, "terrified" is the word they use. This was the second subject that parents themselves raised during our discussions. The view was virtually unanimous in both groups, though somewhat stronger in the first. It inspired intense feeling and gave rise to similar stories:

"When my son goes to play, I am always looking out the window and if I can't see him, you know, I'm screaming his name. I get so terrified someone's going to steal him."

". . . even in our neighborhood, the malls, they tell you to get your children fingerprinted . . . I mean, the government, the people all around us tell us to do that."

"There's crazy people out there. They might not be next door, but they're out there someplace."

"I know, for myself, when my kids go out to play, I have my head out the window every minute, 'Yo! Answer me!' You know, you're just afraid."

What is most striking about this common view is that it appears unrelated to the actual experience or incidence of crime. Asked whether their neighborhoods are high-crime areas or whether there have been recent cases of kidnapping or molestation, the parents say "no." In this sense, their neighborhoods are "safe." Even more surprising, they say that they can count on others to watch out for their children. Crossing guards, the elderly, neighbors, households with special stickers in the windows -- all are cited as helpful look-outs.

When pressed, parents are quite specific about the nature of the threat. It isn't theft, robbery, assault and battery, or burglary. It is murder, kidnapping, and sexual molestation. Though they blame the media for generating these fears, they reject the idea that this is just part of an increasingly sensational media culture. "You hear about this little town out in the Midwest somewhere where you think everything should be perfect and something weird happens." If it can happen there, the thinking goes, it can happen here, in Baltimore.

Interestingly, this response corresponds to that reported in a recent survey of 404 parents conducted at the Mayo Clinic. In this survey, 72 percent express fear that their child might be kidnapped by a stranger -- only a slightly lower percentage than

those who fear that their child might be harmed in a car accident. (Dr. Gunnar Stickler and Dr. Margery Salter in a report to the American Pediatric Association.)

However, while the Mayo Clinic study suggests that parents are simply irrational in their fears, we think there may be a deeper rationale for these attitudes. Might not this fear be metaphoric? Might it not suggest a more generalized sense of helplessness in protecting children? One mother talks about the loss of social trust and the difficulty in identifying who is a friend and who is an enemy.

" . . . you just can't trust anybody. That smile you face is not necessarily your friend anymore, and children are not necessarily able to discern whether this is a friend or an enemy . . . Even though you teach them things at home, you don't know what a person can say to entice your child away from their routine."

The 1950s Family and Family Decline

A photograph of a family picnicking at the beach, taken in l958 (Appendix D), draws a positive and affectionate response from these parents. (We expected far more debate than we got about the role of the l950s wife and mother. People laughed at her old-fashioned bathingsuit but not at her old-fashioned role.) Asked to describe how the photo made them feel, people called out: "togetherness," "family," "happy," "carefree," "my idea of fun," "vacation," "innocence," "simplicity," "interaction," "right out of Ozzie and Harriet."

Asked whether they would like to go back to that time, a fairly representative answer was: "You know, the familyness of it is nice. I don't know if that particular family is my bag, but . . ."

At the end of the discussion, we asked participants to comment on where families in America are going. No one offered an optimistic assessment. Some general comments: "We're going too fast and we want too much"; "the American family has the wrong values and there is no image of the American family with values to shoot for, either"; "everything good is gone"; "back twenty years ago, if a woman was pregnant and unwed, she wouldn't go out in public."

The last comment occasioned an energetic debate in the 8:00 p.m. session. The majority view, most forcefully expressed by a black married father, is:

"traditionally people would get married, then have babies, and now you're changing things around, having babies and then maybe getting married later."

From a mother: "One thing, say, take the unwed pregnancy. It's one thing to be unwed and pregnant. OK, you've made a mistake and it's over with; the person

needs help and love . . . but you don't say, 'Oh, that's okay.' Pat on the back. 'Go do it again.'"

Consistent with the affectionate view of the picnicking family is an affectionate view of an earlier era. However, this is not a nonspecific, hazy nostalgia. It is based on a clear enumeration of a new set of hazards:

" . . . in the '50s, you didn't have AIDS. You didn't have the drug abuse problem that you have now. You didn't have child molesters as prevalent as they are today."

A corollary view is that children formerly had the freedom to roam the neighborhood and the city on their own -- by foot, bike, bus -- in the safer l950s.

"I remember my mother letting us go. We'd go back in the woods and we'd go back to the stream, and we'd, you know, play kickball in the middle of the street. You can't let kids do that nowadays."

Q: Why not?

"Because of kidnappers."

"If I wasn't involved in athletics, I was in the city somewhere, riding my bike. And I was . . . movies in the city, or in another city by way of bus. And again, I don't think people were as concerned with kidnapping and child-mugging and molesting. It wasn't a big issue in the '50s and '60s."

Necessity Versus Choice

In thinking about the question of time versus money, needs versus wants, parents are guided by what they see as their two basic responsibilities: first, providing for the physical and material well-being of their children; and second, providing for the moral and spiritual well-being of their children. At one time, the responsibilities of providing materially and providing morally were demarcated by gender and realm -- sharply divided between the breadwinning father and the homemaking mother. Now, as the strict division between breadwinning and homemaking roles break down and the distinct boundaries between home and workplace blur, there is greater uncertainty about how time and attention should be allocated in performing these two traditional parental duties.

Generally speaking, the consensus among these parents is that the breadwinning role is primary. For single parents, this view allows a kind of clarity of purpose and unambiguous rationale for their behavior. No one challenges the single mother who says, "there isn't any choice with me. I must work. I'm a single parent family and I

get no support, so, I mean, it's me or nothing."

Moreover, there is general agreement that there are growing economic pressures on parents.

"I think the economy forces people to both have to work in order to be able to make it."

"Things cost . . . the price of things now are astronomical for anything as far as that goes. And most jobs, I'm sure everybody knows, doesn't pay a fortune. So that means the husband and wife has to work just to make it go."

Even though the clear majority of families own their homes and most devote approximately 25-30 percent of total family income to housing costs, they connect the prohibitive costs of homeownership to the growing need for two providers:

"You can't look at a starter home today, you're lucky if you find one for $80-l00,000. And then where do you come up with a down payment to start this? You know, it's hard enough to get things going."

"It dictates that both will work. You know, that's not uncommon for somebody to have $l,000 a month mortgage."

For one married mother of three, working full-time is the only way she can hope to own a home someday. (She reports a family income of over $50,000 with 50 percent of the income going for apartment rental.)

". . . women who work, they're not working because they want to get away from the children, they're working probably because it's a necessity. In order to make ends meet or like, in my case, my husband and I want to have a home, so in order to do that we both have to work and save money . . . I don't want for the rest of my life to be living in an apartment complex."

Some fathers, when pressed, acknowledge that it would be hard to turn down a raise of, say, 35 percent, even if it meant giving up time with their children:

"Everybody would like to spend more time with their family but they're also not going to pass up a raise or promotion. Because that raise or promotion might make it a little bit easier . . . "

Others, however, steadfastly claim that they have been offered such opportunities in the past and have turned them down.

Among the financially better-off married parents, there is less certainty about how to fulfill the dual responsibilities of material provider and moral teacher. This is where we encounter clear differences of opinion about what constitutes indulgence, weakness, materialism, and moral neglect.

"Depends on what you want, how materialistic you are and what you're willing to settle for. If you can do with less and stay home, or if you want everything you see and you're materialistic, you're going to have to work for it. Then you still can't get it all." (Anna, married at-home mother, l child, $30-40,000)

"I love our house. It's a brick home and we have inherited a car from my father-in-law. When he passed away we got his car, and our other car . . . we bought a stationwagon from my brother. He was selling it. And, I mean, I don't need everything but yet I have my two kids . . . I'm home with them. To me it's more important to have the kids than the fancy house. Because when I grow up and I'm old, I'm not going to be by myself [laugh] without kids." (Linda, mother and part-time typist and childcare worker, 2 children, $25-30,000)

"I mean, you don't want to give it to them where they get so far out of hand that they're uncontrollable, but you still want them to have it a lot nicer than you did, to have some things that you didn't have growing up, or go someplace that you always wanted to go to and never went to." (Robert, married, 2 children, ironworker, $30-40,000)

"We could do fine with just my husband's income, but that's it -- we'd just do fine, we can't buy the things that we want. And we spend a lot of money on food -- groceries -- and we like to eat good. I mean, when I work, it supplies us with all the extra things that we want in life. And if I didn't work, then we'd be limited to a certain extent. So, if my son says to me, why do I have to work, it's to give him the nice things in life."

> Q: What do you count as extras?
>
> "Just, to go on vacation, buying furniture, buying things for the house, and to put improvements on our house, clothes, anything. Entertainment." (Jackie, married, one child, real estate agent, $50,000+)

"My kids aren't the best-dressed kids in school, but I spend a lot more time with them. We sit down and have dinner together every night . . . I very rarely had that in my house when I was growing up." (Fred, married, two children, technical analyst for investment firm, $50,000+)

Concluding Comments

This group of parents may represent an unusually rooted group, geographically stable and perhaps reflecting the older industrial base of Baltimore's economy. If so, it will be important to look at families with children in other geographic areas, particularly where there is a dominant service economy. In future discussions, it may also be fruitful to look at how mobility and income levels affect childcare and other mutal aid arrangements. We might expect to find more contractual and market-based relationships among higher income, professional, and managerial families with children.

To summarize briefly, the following themes emerged as the strongest and most striking findings in our inquiry:

1. Parents are frightened about their children's physical safety.

Their worry is very specific. They fear child abduction and child molestation by strangers. This fear is intense, despite the fact -- which they freely acknowledge -- that the incidence or experience of such crimes is rare. Indeed, it is the seeming randomness of such crimes that make them so terrifying.

2. Childcare arrangements are overwhelmingly familial in character.

In most cases, the family members are parents and grandparents. Grandmothers provide childcare but so too, in a couple of notable cases, do grandfathers. Even the paternal grandparents of children in single-mother households help care for the children.

In the future, it would be interesting to establish a sense of the duration of these familial arrangements. Do they continue over a number of years or are they stop-gap or short-term arrangments? Or, are they preferred as forms of caregiving primarily for very young children rather than for older school-age children?

Clearly, the family basis for childcare is related to the family's geographic proximity to relatives. If a large number of these parents no longer lived close to relatives, then care by family members, other than another parent, would not be an option. However, the question arises: is family-based childcare motivated by more than mere geographic happenstance? Do families take advantage of childcare provided by relatives because they live in the area, or do they choose to remain in the area because there are relatives nearby who will care for their children?

For the mothers particularly, childcare preferences shape job choices more than job commitments dictate childcare arrangements. They elect shift work, weekend

work, seasonal work, and home-based work in order to maximize parent or relative care. Several mothers work in daycare centers where they can take their own children along; others provide family daycare in their own home. Some parents prefer relative childcare to nonrelative childcare because it is kinder to the child. They are better able to maintain a child's regular meal and sleep schedule if a parent or relative is the caregiver. Also, relatives can more easily fill in the times not covered by conventional daycare arrangements. In several of these family households, relatives regularly start dinner, put children to bed, or spend the night.

These strong preferences raise a question: If so many of today's parents now work, what will happen when this generation of grandparents disappears?

3. Childcare arrangements are far more individualized and complex than the standard childcare surveys and studies suggest.

To repeat, it is very difficult to fit a family's childcare arrangements into the standard categories used by daycare providers (full-time; half-days; afterschool and the like). Parents use a combination of arrangements rather than one single type, typically combining shift work, home-based work, relative care, and trading-off childcare responsibilities with each other. Moreover, although our study did not explore childcare histories, there is clearly a longitudinal dimension to childcare. If we were to develop a picture of a family's childcare arrangements over time, particularly for families with more than one child, we might expect to find an even more complex pattern.

4. These parents feel at odds with the society economically and culturally.

They no longer define the mainstream, and they know it. They find it more difficult to provide the basics: food, clothing, a roof over their children's heads. At the same time, they find it more difficult to teach their children the basics: to do what's right; to stick up for your beliefs; to honor your father and mother; to abide by the values of family, faith, and community rather than those of the marketplace.

Based on this inquiry, we suggest further exploration of two areas of intense parental concern: (l) the aggressive invasion of marketplace values into family life and, as part of that phenomenon, the growth of a precocious peer culture; and (2) the widespread sense of danger and social menace.

Appendix A:
Sample telephone screener

INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN VALUES

2 FOCUS GROUPS - 6:00 AND 8:00 P.M. SEPTEMBER 18, 1990

SAMPLE TELEPHONE SCREENER

HONORARIUM: $35.00 STANDARD INTRODUCTION

1. Are you the Male/Female head of the household?

   Yes _____ No _____ If no, may I speak to the person who is?

2. Are you married?

   Yes _____ No _____ (Check Quota)

   Two parents in each group can be single.

3. Do you have any children between the ages of 2 and 10 living at home?

   Yes _____ No _____ (Terminate)

   All must have at least 1 child between the age of 2 & 10.

4. In what category does your total household income fall?

   12,000 - 18,000 _____ (single only)
   18,000 - 25,000 _____ (single only)
   25,000 - 30,000 _____
   30,000 - 40,000 _____(CHECK QUOTAS)
   40,000 - 50,000 _____ONLY 2 IN EACH GROUP
   50,000 + _____CAN GO OVER 50,000

5. Do you and your spouse both work full time?

   Yes _____ No _____ (If no, ask Q. 6.)
   IF YES, SKIP TO Q. 8.

We need 4 cases where both spouses work full time in each group.

6. Do you or your spouse work part time and the other work full time?

Yes _____ No _____ (If no, ask Q. 7.)
IF YES, SKIP TO Q. 8.

We need 2 cases where one spouse works full time and the other part time in each group.

7. Would you consider your household to be a one-earner household?

Yes _____ No _____

We need 4 in each group.

8. Have you ever attended a focus group discussion?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, how long ago was that? _____ If less than a year, terminate.

INVITE TO GROUP:

SEPTEMBER 18, 1990 6:00 P.M. _____

8:00 P.M. _____

INTERVIEWER: _____

Appendix B:

Sample questionnaire

Tabulation of questionnaire results

Name _____

Number of Children _____

Ages of Children _____

Are all of these children currently living in your home? _____

How long have you lived in the Baltimore area? _____

How much time does it take you to commute to work? _____

How much time does it take you to travel by car to the home of the relative that lives nearest to you? _____

Do you own your own home? _____

Approximately what percentage of your household income does your family spend on housing costs each month? _____

How many hours do you work for pay in a typical week? _____

If you are employed outside the home, do you generally work the same hours every weekday? _____

If your spouse is employed outside the home, does he/she generally work the same hours every weekday? _____

Age _____

Marital Status _____

If married, is this your first marriage? _____

WHITEHEAD CHART

Baltimore Parents: Results from Questionnaire

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Marital Status	Number of Children	Age of Children	Family Income in $1,000s	Dual Earner (hours / week)	Single Earner	Home-Owner (%)	Income to Housing	Years in Balt.	Time to Relative	Time to Each Work	(m
Hessenauer	M	47	W	M:not 1st	1	5	30-40	40		yes	33	47	40	45	yes
Buedel	M	30	W	M:1st	1	2.5	50+	50-55		yes	30	30	5	30-45	yes	yes
Moris	M	36	W	M:1st	3	9;7;4			40	yes	35-40	36	1	15	yes	N/A
Lewis	F	27	W	M:1st	1	6	50+	40+		yes	25	15	5	15	no	yes
Hughes	F	28	B	M:1st	3	9;4;20 mos	50+	39.5		no	50	4	20	20	yes	no
Jones	M	39	B	M:1st	3	13;5;3	50+	35		yes	25	10	5 hours	40	N/A	yes
Wiberg	F	37	W	Divorced		1	6.5	25-30		30	no	25	37	10	30	yes	N/A
Greek	F	33	W	Divorced		1	9	18-25		68	yes	N/A	33	30	15	yes	N/A
Ukandu	F	N/A	B	Separated		2	6;4	18-25		6	no	50	N/A	10-15	10-15	yes
Kistler	F	35	W	M:1st	2	11;7	30-40	30		yes	20	35	10	10	yes	yes
Cohen	F	39	W	M:1st	2	10;5	40-50	18		yes	40	39	10	5	yes	yes
Martin	F	30	W	M:not 1st		2	9;5	50+	2-8		yes	25-33	8	20	10-60	no	yes
Rasinski	M	37	W	M:1st	2	7;5	30-40	40			yes	20	37	15	30	yes	no
Leiner	F	36	W	M:1st	2	6;3.5	40-50	20		yes	N/A	22	15	3	yes	yes
Smoot	M	50	W	M:not 1st		2	12;7	30-40	48		no	25	50	45	15	no	no
Knudsen	F	28	W	M:1st	2	6;1	25-30	25			yes	20	28	5	0	N/A	yes

Taylor	F	37	B	M:1st	1	10	30-40		At home		no	20	37	45	N/A	N/A	no
Potter	M	34	W	M:1st	2	6;4	N/A		70	yes	40	34	4	15	no	N/A	
Titus	M	35	W	M:not 1st		2	8;5	25-30	44		no	25	35	45	30	yes	no
Seward	F	30	W	M:1st	2	7;4.5	50+		At home		yes	30	4	15	N/A	N/A	yes
Vargas	M	38	N/A	M:not 1st		1	5	25-30		40	yes	35	30	8 hours	30	yes	N/A

Appendix C:

Sample family time report

Using the codes listed below, please fill in the appropriate boxes to indicate how you and your family spent your time yesterday or (if you find it easier) how you and your family spend a typical weekday.

H: Home W: Work D/S: Day Care/School SL: Sleep O: Other

Please count all time spent commuting to and from work as work ("W") time. also, if an hour was divided between activities, please use the code that reflects where the better part of that hour was spent. For example, if you were asleep yesterday from 6:00-6:40 a.m., you would place an "SL" in the appropriate box.

YOU SPOUSE CHILD #1 CHILD #2 CHILD #3

6-7 a.m.
7-8 a.m.
8-9 a.m.
9-10 a.m.
10-11 a.m.
11-noon
12-1 p.m.
1-2 p.m.
2-3 p.m.
3-4 p.m.
4-5 p.m.
5-6 p.m.
6-7 p.m.
7-8 p.m.
8-9 p.m.
9-10 p.m.
10-11 p.m.
11-midnite
12-1 a.m.
1-2 a.m.
2-3 a.m.
3-4 a.m.
4-5 a.m.
5-6 a.m.

Appendix D:

Study Guide

Exhibit l: Family on picnic, l958

Exhibit 2: Audio transcript of Goodyear videotape

Exhibit 3: Idea cluster statements

TIME USE FOCUS GROUP

STUDY GUIDE

Purpose: To explore the way that families with children organize, allocate, and think about time.

Welcome to participants.

Description of research project.

How focus group will work (observers; confidentiality; taping; etc.)

Introductions.

Tell us a little about yourself and your family. How many family members at home? Number and age of children? If you work outside the home, where do you work? What is your job? Who cares for your child/ren while you/spouse are at work?

DESCRIBING BEHAVIORS: participants report on time use during traditional after school, after work hours -- 5-9 p.m. -- and, if we have time, on their time use between 5-9 a.m., another time period families traditionally spend together.

Participants will have filled out a time log before the discussion begins. Interviewer will have copies of their logs and will select several members of the group to report on where they are and what they are doing during these hours.

Take us through your regular schedule between 5-9 as you've reported it on this questionnaire. Tell us where you are, whom you're with, what you're doing during these hours. (Probe: At home or at work or in transit? With family members or apart? Where is your spouse at this time? Your children? What activities are you engaged in? Who eats when with whom?)

Thinking about your weekly schedule, how many times a week do you estimate you and your family members are all together for the evening meal?

Thinking about your family's schedule between 5-9, how does it compare to your family's schedule between 5-9 when you were growing up?

TIME PATTERNS: Is the pattern of time use highly individualized or are there shared patterns of home, school, and work?

Thinking about your schedule, how closely does it resemble the schedule of other people in your neighborhood?

EXERCISING CHOICE: How much freedom do participants say they have to change existing schedules? Do they see themselves as captives or masters of their routines?

As you think about your schedule, is there any part you'd like to change?

Are you able to change what you'd like to change? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION OF GOODYEAR COMMERCIAL: This exercise is designed to get participants to talk about the trade-off between time and money without framing the question in those words. The commercial is ambiguous and will support more than one interpretation.

I'm going to show you a Goodyear tire commercial. It's been on TV so you may have seen it. We'll watch it once or twice and then we'll talk about it.

(Mother and young daughter are driving in the car at night during a rainstorm.)

Daughter: Mommy, why do you have to travel so much?

Mother: That's my job, honey. And that's how we get the things we need, and we get to live in a big house.

(A car shoots out in front of the mother's car. She swerves, narrowly avoiding a collision with the other car.)

Voice-over: One day, it could all come down to a few inches. For those few inches, it's good to know you have Goodyear tires.

Daughter: We could live in a smaller house.

Mother: Thank you, darling.

End of commercial.

What do you make of this commercial?

Tell me about the mother. What kind of person is she? Why does she say "thank you" at the end?

Does this commercial describe a real-life situation? If so, have you dealt with it in your family?

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY LIFE: What is the range of response triggered by this 1958 photograph of a family on vacation? Do participants view the changes in family life optimistically or pessimistically? Is there an ideal of family life that is shared, whatever the reality of one's own family situation? Do participants see their own family as an expression of the ideal?

I'm going to show you a picture now. Look at it for a minute and then I have some questions.

Off the top of your heads, call out the words that first come to mind when you look at this picture. I'll keep a list. (Probe on words generated.)

When was this picture taken? How do you know?

How would you update it to reflect a family on vacation today?

Does this picture describe your family?

How would you change it to fit your own family circumstances?

SOCIAL OUTLOOK: We want to explore participants' "philosophy" of family life, especially their sense of whether or not the family today is in decline.

When you think of your own family, what times or routines do you most look forward to and enjoy? What do you enjoy least?

Where are families today headed?

BALTIMORE FOCUS GROUP

GOODYEAR TELEVISION COMMERCIAL - AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

(Mother and young daughter are driving in car at night during a rainstorm.)

Daughter: Mommy, why do you have to travel so much?

Mother: That's my job, honey. And that's how we get the things we need, and we get to live in a big house.

(A car shoots out in front of the mother's car. She swerves, narrowly avoiding a collision with the other car.)

Voice-over: One day, it could all come down to a few inches. For those few inches, it's good to know you have Goodyear tires.

Daughter: We could live in a smaller house.

Mother: Thank you, darling.

BALTIMORE FOCUS GROUP

IDEA CLUSTER STATEMENTS

It's not so much that we need to make ends meet. It's the way we get extra things. I grew up in a poor family with four kids and we had no extras. There's no way my kids are going to be like that. We want to make sure that if they're not good athletes or smart academically, they can still go to college.

You get addicted to overworking. At the same time, you have so many more obligations as a parent now. These days, you have to start brushing their teeth before they have teeth.

I'd like to be around more for my kids, the way my parents were for me. But the simple fact is, I have to work just to put food on the table. I have no choice, so my kids have to get used to doing more on their own.

Almost everyone I know says they put their families first. But I look around and I wonder about that. I don't know anyone who's given up a raise or a promotion in order to spend more time with the kids, including me. And somewhere down the road, I think we're all going to pay a price for our choices.