

## A black community with advanced labor force characteristics in 1960

*Women in a middle-class black community in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1960 were found to exhibit labor force characteristics associated with white women in the late 20th century*

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An American community in which 80 percent of women are college educated, work in the professions, delay marriage and childbearing until their late twenties, and return to work within a few years of childbirth would not seem remarkable in 2007. By contrast, a community with these characteristics in 1960 would have appeared “off the charts” to sociologists and labor economists alike. Yet, these demographic characteristics were observed in an upper middle-class African-American community in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1960.

Information on this community was collected as part of a large-scale University of Maryland Medical School study of social class, socialization patterns, and personality development in Baltimore’s African-American community between September 1960 and June 1962.<sup>1</sup> Detailed analyses of the social, cultural, and child-rearing patterns of the community have appeared in previous publications.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

This article focuses on the distinctive labor force characteristics of the women in the aforesaid community. Using statistical data from a number of governmental and academic sources, the article compares the changes in education, employment, occupation, and earnings of U.S. women—especially middle-class white women—over the past four decades with the 1960 profile of the Baltimore women. The effects of the changing labor force characteristics of mainstream women on their household roles, fertility patterns, and children’s gender role socialization also will be considered in light of the Baltimore findings.

### Research methods

The 1960 study collected demographic information from 169 families in the Baltimore chapter of Lads and Lassies,<sup>5</sup> a prestigious national black

family and children’s organization. Twenty-five of these families that had 5-year-old children were recruited for an Intensive Study Sample. Information on the children’s socialization within the family setting came from standardized observations of the children in the home, as well as from the children’s autobiographical stories and drawings. Information on the mothers’ child-rearing practices came from parent interviews using the Sears, Maccoby, and Levin (SML) questionnaire developed for a Harvard study of white Massachusetts mothers in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> The two sets of information allowed for a comparison of socialization practices within the two communities.

### Working mothers

Recruiting Lads and Lassies families with a 5-year-old child whose mother stayed home full time proved very difficult. In 1960, 82 percent of the Lads and Lassies mothers of 5-year-olds were in the labor force. This percentage was in marked contrast to that of white Massachusetts mothers of 5-year-olds, only 17 percent of whom worked at least part time after the birth of the child. White-collar and blue-collar Massachusetts mothers showed no significant difference in this trait.<sup>7</sup> In the United States, fewer than 1 in 5 mothers with children under 6 years (18.6 percent) were in the labor force in 1960.<sup>8</sup>

A high number of the Lads and Lassies mothers were employed in professional occupations. These mothers reported returning to work within months or a year or two of giving birth, because of the importance of their incomes in maintaining an upper middle-class family lifestyle.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Baltimore black mothers reported that there was an expectation in their community *that a woman with professional training would wish to work.*

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As the following data from the Current Population Survey show, the decades between 1960 and 2000 saw a steady increase in the labor force participation rate of married women with children under 6 years:

| Year      | Labor force participation rate of married women with children under 6 years |
|-----------|---|
| 1960..... | 18.6  |
| 1970..... | 30.3  |
| 1980..... | 45.1  |
| 1990..... | 58.2  |
| 2000..... | 65.3  |

By 2000, 65.3 percent of married women with children under 6 years were in the labor force, coming closer to the rate observed for the Lads and Lassies mothers in 1960.<sup>10</sup>

Writing in 2000, Mahshid Jalivand, a professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin, attributed the increase in employment to “women’s increasing perception of market work and careers as sources of rewards (psychic as well as financial) that can be complementary to rather than substitutable for careers in the home.”<sup>11</sup> Among the factors contributing to the rise in American women’s labor force participation, Jalivand lists “an increase in the amount of the wives’ education, an increasing wage rate, the changing economic position of women, declines in the male–female earnings gap, lower fertility, [and] a larger interval between marriage and the birth of the first child.”<sup>12</sup> Many of these factors were already operating for the Lads and Lassies families in 1960 and will be explored in what follows.

### Education

In education, slightly more of the Lads and Lassies mothers (91 percent) than fathers (79 percent) had completed 4 years of college.<sup>13</sup> The following tabulation based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics lists the percentages of persons aged 25 years and older with 4 or more years of college, by race and sex, in 1960 and 2000:

| Demographic category                             | 1960 | 2000 |
|--|------|------|
| Lads and Lassies fathers ( <i>n</i> = 169) ..... | 79.0 | ...  |
| Lads and Lassies mothers ( <i>n</i> = 169) ..... | 91.0 | ...  |
| White non-Hispanic men .....                     | 10.3 | 30.8 |
| White non-Hispanic women.....                    | 6.0  | 25.5 |
| Black non-Hispanic men.....                      | 3.5  | 16.4 |
| Black non-Hispanic women .....                   | 3.6  | 16.8 |

In 1960, among U.S. whites with a college education, men outnumbered women by close to 2 to 1 (10.3 percent, compared with 6.0 percent). By 2000, the gender gap in college completion rates for whites had closed considerably: white men had a college completion rate of 30.8 percent, compared with 25.5 percent for white women. For blacks, the national rates of college completion by sex were almost identical in 1960 and 2000: 3.6 percent for women and 3.5 percent for men in 1960, and

16.8 percent and 16.4 percent, respectively, in 2000.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, the percentage of the women’s labor force composed of women with 4 or more years of college nearly tripled from 1970 to 2004, from 11.2 percent to 32.6 percent.<sup>15</sup> The increase may reflect not only higher levels of educational achievement for women during that period, but an increasing willingness on the part of college-educated women to join the labor force. In 1970, the labor force participation rate for women aged 25 to 64 years with 4 or more years of college was 60.9 percent. By 1987, that figure had climbed to 80.3 percent, which approaches the 82 percent employment rate for the Lads and Lassies mothers in 1960. The labor force participation rate for men with 4 or more years of college declined slightly between 1970 and 1987, from 96.1 percent to 94.2 percent.<sup>16</sup>

### Occupation

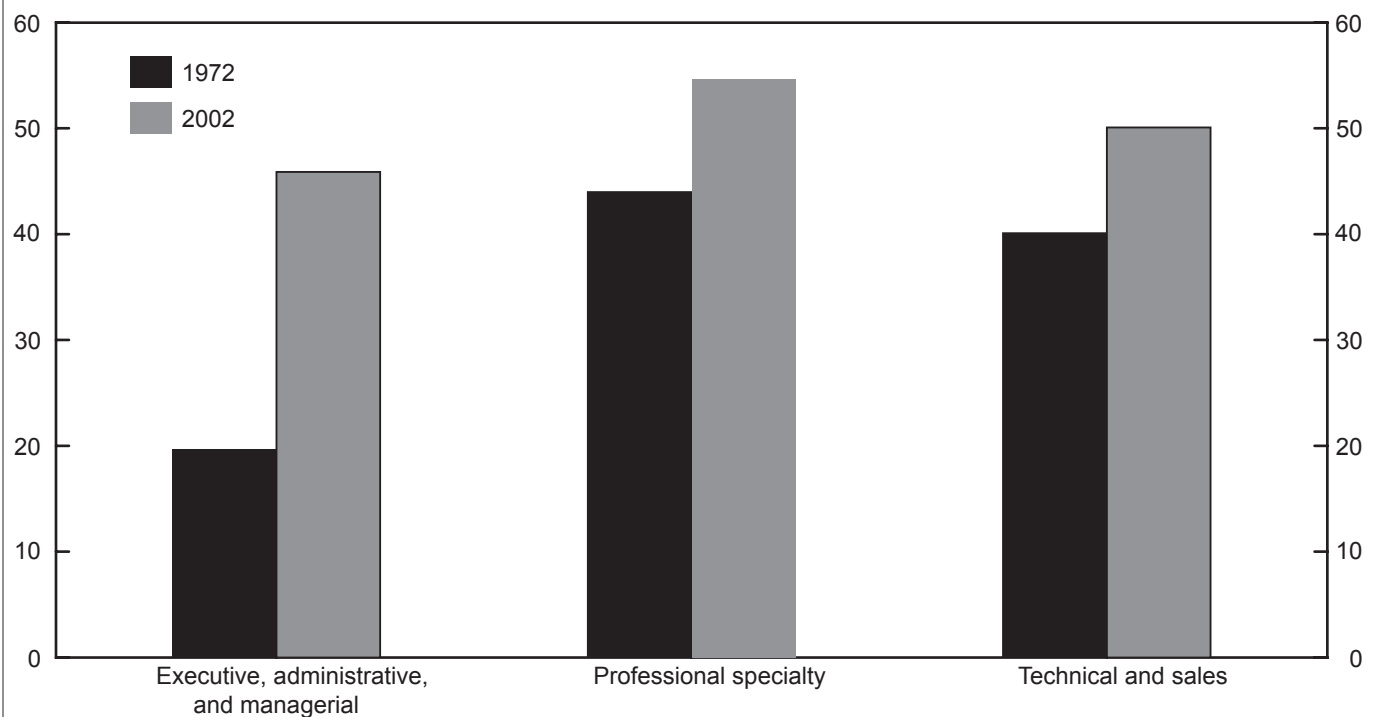
In 1960, 52,123 whites and 7,760 blacks in Baltimore were employed in professional and technical, and managerial and proprietary, occupations. Of the whites, men held 71 percent and women 29 percent of these positions. For the blacks in those occupations, the gender distribution was almost equal: 47 percent were men, 53 percent women.<sup>17</sup> Occupational information, available only for the Lads and Lassies Intensive Study Sample, shows that 22 (88 percent) of the 25 employed fathers and 19 (90 percent) of the 21 employed mothers worked in positions in the aforementioned occupational categories.

It took decades for the general female population in the United States to attain the gender parity seen in professional, technical, and managerial occupations among blacks in Baltimore in 1960. Between 1972 and 2002, U.S. women’s share of total employment in the managerial, professional, and technical occupations increased substantially. The proportion of women employed in executive, administrative, and managerial positions more than doubled over that period, from 19.7 percent to 45.9 percent. In professional specialties, women’s share rose from 44.0 percent to 54.7 percent. The percentage of women employed in technical and sales positions rose from 40.1 to 50.1 percent.<sup>18</sup> Combining women’s shares of employment in these occupational categories for 2002 reveals that women constituted 50.23 percent of those employed in these occupations, a figure similar to the 53-percent share of the managerial, professional, and technical jobs held by this group of black Baltimorean women in 1960. (See chart 1.)

### Economic position of women

In 1960, 19 percent of white families and 6 percent of black families in Baltimore reported incomes of \$10,000 or more on the decennial census.<sup>19</sup> For the Lads and Lassies families in the Intensive Study Sample, the combined household income was slightly more than \$10,000 when the husband worked full time and the wife part time and was in the \$13,000–\$17,000 range when both spouses worked full time.<sup>20</sup> (Incomes over \$50,000

**Chart 1. Women's shares of employment in professional, technical, and managerial occupations, 1972 and 2002**



were reported for some households with a physician husband and a professionally employed wife.)

Between 1963 and 1992, the percentage of marriages in which the husband provided 70 percent or more of the couple's income declined from 78 percent to 46 percent among whites and from 71 percent to 33 percent among African-Americans.<sup>21</sup> Wives' earnings rose from 26 percent to 35 percent of their families' earnings between 1973 and 2003. Between 1967 and 2003, the percentage of married couples in which both wife and husband had earnings from work rose from 44 percent to 58 percent.<sup>22</sup> Among working-age married couples, the percentage in which only the husband was employed dropped from 51.4 percent in 1970 to 26 percent in 1987.<sup>23</sup> The proportion of wives earning more than their husbands grew from 18 percent in 1987 to 25 percent in 2003.<sup>24</sup>

### Fertility and the childbearing interval

Recruiting Lads and Lassies families with at least one child of each sex for the Baltimore study proved difficult. An examination of the 1960 Lads and Lassies membership roster showed that, for the 162 native Baltimorean natural mothers, 102 (63 percent) had one child, 39 (24 percent) had two children, and 21 (13 percent) had three or more children.<sup>25</sup> For most of the mothers, childbearing did not begin until their middle to late twenties or early thirties, after they completed their education and professional training. The majority of the Lads and Lassies

women interrupted their professional careers just once, in order to bear a child, and then resumed their careers.<sup>26</sup>

In 1960, the fertility rate (the number of live births per 1,000 women) of white women aged 30 to 34 years with 16 or more years of education was 67.9. By 1990, it had fallen to 48.6, approaching the 1960 fertility rate of 45.6 for black women of similar age and education. (The rate for black women dropped marginally, to 42.8, in 1990.)<sup>27</sup>

Increased education had a marked effect on childbearing patterns of all U.S. women over the 1960–94 period. In 1969, 10.2 percent of women with college degrees bore their first child at age 30 or older. In 1994, the same was true for 45 percent of such women. This change was not observed in women with less than 12 years of education.<sup>28</sup> Between 1975 and 1986, the proportion of college graduate first-time mothers aged 30 to 34 years increased from 40 percent to 48 percent, and the proportion of first-time mothers aged 35–39 years rose from 32 percent to 53 percent.<sup>29</sup> From 1980 to 1985, the first-birth rate for women in their early twenties with college degrees fell 27 percent.<sup>30</sup> The mothers of the 5-year-olds included in the Lads and Lassies Intensive Study Sample ranged in age from their mid-thirties to mid-forties.<sup>31</sup>

### Household roles

The similarities between the Lads and Lassies families in 1960 and contemporary families in mainstream American society

extend well beyond labor force characteristics to family and household organization and the gender socialization of children. Information on household organization and family routines in the Lads and Lassies families was collected through ethnographic observations conducted between 1960 and 1962.<sup>32</sup> Household observations on each family, conducted for 15 days, entailed arriving at the family's home in the morning when the child awoke and remaining "on location" through the child's waking hours until bedtime. The description that follows is written in the "ethnographic present."<sup>33</sup>

Typically, the family's weekday routine is organized around the work schedules of the parent or parents who are employed outside the home. Depending upon which parent must leave the house earliest in the morning, one or the other parent will carry out one or more of the morning activities necessary to launch the family members on their day's trajectories. The fathers were observed to perform some or all of the following household or childcare tasks:

- Prepare lunches to be taken to school or the workplace.
- Cook breakfast for the child or the entire family.
- Help the child to dress.
- Help the child to comb his or her hair.
- Drive one or more family members to school or the workplace.
- Prepare afternoon snacks for the child.
- Vacuum floors.
- Shop for the week's groceries.

The participation of the Lads and Lassies fathers in household duties and childcare was uncommon, compared with the societal norms of the 1960s. It was not until the 1990s that sociological studies documented an attitude shift toward more egalitarian gender roles within U.S. households. One example of this shift is the change in response to an item in the General Social Survey, a U.S. household interview survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center: "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and the family." In 1977, only 34 percent of women and 29 percent of men disagreed with that statement. By the late 1990s, the percentages had risen to 67 percent and 60 percent, respectively.<sup>34</sup> Time-use studies reveal that married men's time spent doing housework more than doubled between 1965 and 1995, from 4.7 to 10.4 hours per week. Married women's time in housework over the same period declined from 34 to 19.4 hours per week.<sup>35</sup> There also has been an increase in the number of fathers expressing an interest in being involved in the care and nurturing of their children.<sup>36</sup>

### Gender role socialization

One of the areas of greatest difference in child-rearing patterns between the Lads and Lassies mothers and the white Massa-

chusetts mothers was that of gender role differentiation. The information obtained was drawn from the mothers' responses to the following survey questions on gender role socialization of their 5-year-old children:

- How important do you think it is for a boy of X's age to act like a real boy (or, for a girl of X's age to be ladylike?)
- (For boys) How about playing with dolls and that sort of thing?
- (For girls) How about playing rough games and that sort of thing?
- Do you feel there is any difference in the way boys and girls ought to act at X's age?

Thirty-six percent of the black mothers, compared with 14 percent of the white mothers, believed that little or no difference existed between boys and girls at age 5, with little or no valuing of "masculine" or "feminine" behavior at that age. Conversely, 43 percent of the white mothers, compared with only 18 percent of the black mothers, emphasized, and trained their children for, "some" to "wide" differentiation in a number of behavioral areas.<sup>37</sup> Ethnographic observations of the Lads and Lassies children included instances of girls climbing trees and a boy playing with a doll, without incurring parental disapproval. The white Massachusetts mothers were not atypical for their time. Studies of socialization practices in North America into the 1980s showed a significant sex difference in parents' "encouragement of sex-typed activities and perceptions of sex-typed characteristics" in their children.<sup>38</sup>

By the 1970s, however, a shift was beginning in gender role socialization in the United States, moving in the direction of the Lads and Lassies mothers' attitudes. In 1953, 65 percent of mothers interviewed in the Detroit area said that only boys should be asked to shovel snow and wash the car. In 1971, mothers restricting these tasks to boys had dropped to 50 percent and 31 percent respectively. In 1953, 52 percent of the Detroit area mothers said that only girls should make beds; by 1971, the figure dropped to 29 percent.<sup>39</sup> By the late 1970s, women's increased participation in employment and decreased preoccupation with mothering had resulted in a shift in socialization toward more independence training and toward occupational orientation for girls.<sup>40</sup>

LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH WHITE WOMEN in the late 20th century were observed in women in a middle-class black community in Baltimore in 1960. The relative economic equality of men and women in the Baltimore community stemmed from a segregated occupational structure in which black men did not receive the same financial compensation as white men with similar educational training. For the black middle-class family to enjoy a comfortable standard of living, it was necessary for the wife to return to work soon after the birth of a child and to continue to work for most of her life. In addition to economic pressures, there was a cultural value in



the community holding that professional careers provide fulfillment for college-educated individuals of either gender.<sup>41</sup>

This picture was in marked contrast to the family pattern of the more highly paid white male college graduate, whose single salary was sufficient to provide his family a middle-class standard of living. Even the college-educated wives of white professionals in the 1960s tended to begin child bearing in their early to midtwenties. These women then devoted most of their young and middle adult years to the home and childcare. As late as 1977, the majority of U.S. men and women subscribed to the belief that “it is better for everyone if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and the family.”

In 1960, similar occupational roles for both spouses in the black families were found to be associated with egalitarian household and childcare responsibilities. The egalitarian social

roles of the Lads and Lassies mothers, compared with the roles of the white Massachusetts mothers, were reflected in child socialization patterns. Significantly more of the white mothers expected their children to exhibit native sex differences in behavior, and significantly more trained their daughters and sons to exhibit such differences. The middle-class black Baltimorean parents tended to perceive the behavioral repertoires of their 5-year-old sons and daughters as essentially similar, to regard any sex differences that did exist as relatively unimportant, and to postpone any conscious patterning of gender-appropriate behavior until adolescence.

As white women achieved greater educational, occupational, and economic parity with men over the last decades of the 20th century, their social and household roles, fertility patterns, and child socialization practices came to resemble those observed in the black Lads and Lassies mothers in Baltimore in 1960. □

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Eugene B. Brody, “Cultural Exclusion, Character and Illness,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 122, no. 8 (1966), pp. 852–58.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Blumenfeld, *Children of Integration*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth B. McKay, “Relations of Urban Afro-American Elite and White Communities, 1890–1970,” in *Perspectives on Contemporary African and Afro-American Development*, Occasional Publications No. 1, Afro-American Studies Program (Nashville, Vanderbilt University, 1975), pp. 15–24.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth B. McKay, “One-Child Families and Atypical Sex Ratios in an Elite Black Community,” in Robert Staples, ed., *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Wadsworth Publishing Corp., CA 1978), pp. 177–81.

<sup>5</sup> “Lads and Lassies” is a fictitious name for this organization, which had chapters in more than 20 U.S. cities in 1960.

<sup>6</sup> Robert R. Sears, Eleanor Maccoby, and Harry Levin, *Patterns of Child Rearing* (Evanston, IL, Row, Peterson & Co., 1957).

<sup>7</sup> Data from Sears, Maccoby, and Levin, *Patterns of Child Rearing*; quoted in Blumenfeld, *Children of Integration*, p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> Arleen Leibowitz, Jacob Alex Klerman, and Linda Waite, *Women's Employment During Pregnancy and Following Birth*, National Longitudinal Survey Report no. 92-11 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 1992), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> The lack of higher status employment opportunities for college-educated black men in the Baltimore community during this period led some to jobs—for example, museum guard, postal clerk, and policeman—that were more often held by whites with a high school education. (See Blumenfeld, *Children of Integration*, p. 65).

<sup>10</sup> *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2005), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Mahshid Jalilvand, “Married Women, work, and values,” *Monthly Labor Review*, August 2000, pp. 26–31.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Blumenfeld, *Children of Integration*, p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> *Digest of Education Statistics, 2001*, NCES 2002-130 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Women in the Labor Force*, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Labor Force Statistics from the CPS, 1948–1987*, Bulletin 2307 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> *U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing; General Population Characteristics; General Social and Economic Characteristics 1900; 1910; 1960. Baltimore, Maryland and Maryland, United States* (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1961).

<sup>18</sup> “Women at Work: A Visual Essay,” *Monthly Labor Review*, Oct. 2003, pp. 45–50.

<sup>19</sup> *General Social and Economic Characteristics, Baltimore, 1960* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1961).

<sup>20</sup> Blumenfeld, *Children of Integration*, pp. 52, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Aimée R. Dechter and Pamela J. Smock, *The Fading Breadwinner Role and the Economic Implications for Young Couples*, Institute for Research on Poverty, Discussion Paper No. 1051-94 (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin, December, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> *Women in the Labor Force*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson, “Overworked Individuals or Overworked Families? Explaining Trends in Work, Leisure, and Family Time,” *Work and Occupations*, February 2001, pp. 40–63.

<sup>24</sup> *Women in the Labor Force*, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> McKay, “One-Child Families,” pp. 178–80.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>27</sup> Robert D. Mare, *Differential Fertility, Intergenerational Mobility, and Racial Inequality*, Center for Demography and Ecology CDE Working Paper No. 97-03 (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin, February 1997), pp. 40–41.

<sup>28</sup> Katherine E. Heck, Kenneth C. Schoendorf, Stephanie J. Ventura, and John L. Kiely, “Delayed Childbearing by Education Level in the United States,” *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, June 1997, pp. 81–88.

<sup>29</sup> Stephanie J. Ventura, *Trends and Variations in First Births to Older Women, 1970–1986*, Vital and Health Statistics, Series 21 (National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, June 1989), p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Caroline Lewis and Stephanie Ventura, *Births and Fertility Rates by Education: 1980 and 1985*, Vital and Health Statistics, Series 21 (National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October 1990), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Blumenfeld, unpublished data.

<sup>32</sup> Ethnography attempts to describe the culture, or way of life, of a particular society from the point of view of members of that society.

<sup>33</sup> The “ethnographic present” is the anthropological convention whereby

behaviors that were observed some time in the past are reported in the present tense, as they were practiced at the time of observation.

<sup>34</sup> Arland Thornton and Linda Young-DeMarco, "Four Decades of Trends in Attitudes toward Family Issues in the United States: The 1960s through the 1990s," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, November 2001, pp. 1009–37.

<sup>35</sup> Suzanne M. Bianchi, Melissa A. Milkie, Liana C. Sayer, and John P. Robinson, "Is Anyone Doing the Housework? Trends in the Gender Division of Household Labor," *Social Forces*, September 2000, pp. 191–228.

<sup>36</sup> Teresa L. Jump and Linda Haas, "Fathers in Transition: Dual-Career Fathers Participating in Childcare," in Michael S. Kimmel (ed.), *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (Newbury Park, CA, Sage Publications, 1987), pp. 98–114.

<sup>37</sup> Blumenfeld, *Children of Integration*, pp. 160–61.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh Lytton and David M. Romney, "Parents' Differential Socialization of Boys and Girls: A Meta-analysis," *Psychological Bulletin*, March 1991, pp. 267–96; see especially p. 283.

<sup>39</sup> Lois W. Hoffman, "Changes in Family Roles, Socialization, and Sex Differences," *American Psychologist*, August 1977, pp. 644–57; see especially p. 650.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 655.

<sup>41</sup> Another factor to consider is the historical legacy of slavery in the black community, under which all able-bodied women and men were expected to work. The 1960 cultural study of the Lads and Lassies parents notes that some of their grandparents had been born into slavery and that "accounts of episodes in the lives of slave ancestors are to be heard in the Negro community today." (See Blumenfeld, *Children of Integration*, pp. 38–39.)