Perceptions About Work-Family Balance

Among DU Community Members

With Young Children

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY – WINTER 2017

SECTION 2: Family Dynamics
Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Throughout the interviews that were conducted for this project, many reoccurring themes arose. One of the main themes that was discovered was family dynamics. Family dynamics is expressed in the interactions that occur between family members, the composition of a family, and the way that it functions. In regards to a work-life balance in the DU community, family dynamics influences many other areas. These areas were identified as the sub-themes and relate to different aspects of family dynamics. The sub-themes identified were as follows: immigration status, independence, family bonding, gratitude, cultural values, outsourcing care, and partnership equality. These sub-themes affect family dynamics in unique ways.

Immigration status effects family dynamics in the context of a work/life balance through different areas of life. The immigration status brings challenges to family dynamics mainly as it relates to bringing different familial customs and leaving other family behind as resources for outsourcing care. Independence is defined as the ability of the parent or parents to take care of their children without relying on the help of others. Family bonding is the experience of the family spending quality time together and becoming closer. Through family bonding, families can create relationships that are mutually beneficial to all the members. Gratitude is showing thankfulness towards programs or people that help people maintain their work/life balance.

Cultural values inform family dynamics through beliefs, social norms, practices and meanings. The use of outside help to care for children is considered outsourcing care. Outsourced care has effects on family dynamics as they integrate other people and programs into family life. Partnership equality as a subtheme is defined as the sharing of responsibilities for those who care for the children.
The overarching theme of family dynamics is expressed through the different sub-themes and they in turn affects the work-life balance for a family. Family dynamics are increasingly important to understand the University of Denver community. The previously mentioned sub-themes of family dynamics are analyzed in quotes from the transcribed interviews in the following sections.

**Immigration Status**

As a parent working or studying at DU, immigration status plays a significant role in Family Dynamics. Moving to the US from another country comes with many challenges that a family will need to take on and attempt to overcome. These difficulties include language barriers, unfamiliar customs and traditions, and even political and socioeconomic shifts. Immigrant families will most likely have different cultural practices in their home and family make-up than those born in or long term resident of the United States.

After conducting several interviews with members of the DU community, we discovered that multiple individuals are familiar with difficulties related to immigration. One interviewee in particular revealed in their interview that their family was an immigrant family from Korea; "No, we don’t have any nannies or babysitters. We’re actually very unique because we are an immigrant family from Korea, so we try to raise our kids on our own..." The decision of whether to hire a nanny is one every family must consider at some point while raising a child. The background of the parents and how they themselves were raised impacts this decision heavily.

Another interviewee briefly touched on some challenges their family faces due to their immigrant status. This person expanded on a distinct difference between the cultures of their home country and that of the U.S: “… because I am from another country so I have an
international background, sometimes we do need to deal with the cultural differences. Like here the parents take care of the children/baby but in my home country we do rely on grandparents to take care of the baby most of the time.” Through our interviews, we repeatedly found that the child rearing strategies and norms of other countries differ greatly from those in the U.S. Rather than discussing the more logistical difficulties that can arise from immigration, these interviewees focused on the cultural changes they have experienced. Both of these interviewees discuss how heavily their native cultures influence their opinions and likeliness to outsource childcare.

The last interviewee is an American citizen with an immigrant husband and exemplifies the experiences of immigrant families. She directly spoke about the issue of not having a local familial network to help raise their child: “My family is not in the area, and my husband, he's not from this country so his family are halfway around the world. So we don’t have extended family here to support [us].” The loneliness many migrants experience when moving to a new country, even when coupled, can at times be incredibly difficult, especially when raising children.

These interviews illuminate stark differences between the United States and other countries. Immigrating certainly puts a strain on families, particularly on parents. The second and third quotes demonstrate how being away from one’s native country complicates secondary care for a child. Both interviewees were either from another country or are married to someone from another country and because of this they are left with few direct family members to help care for their child. These difference in family’s views of outsourcing care and ability to have extended family assist in child rearing impacts immigrant families’ abilities to balance work and life.
Independence

Another subtheme of Family Dynamics is independence, which is the ability of a parent or parents to provide care for their children without outside help. Levels of independence vary, from a single parent with financial independence caring for the child in tandem with a childcare worker, or a family who does not believe in outsourcing childcare to a nanny and relies on their extended relatives instead. The definition of independence differs depending on the makeup or cultural values of the family. The way that independence is viewed within a family is important to understanding the way that family functions. By looking at different types of families and parents many insights can be learned about what it means to be independent as a family.

Throughout the interview process and transcription, most interviewees discuss some aspect of independence and how it impacts their family life and childcare. There are many ties between independence and partnership, as well as cultural differences between the importance placed on raising a family with help from the extended family and the importance placed on not outsourcing the childcare responsibilities to formal programs. This is seen in the quote from the immigrant family from Korea and the case where extended family is not close by. "No, we don’t have any nannies or babysitters. We’re actually very unique because we are an immigrant family from Korea, so we try to raise our kids on our own..." The values of different cultures depict a unique familial emphasis on independence. The previous quote reflects the importance of cultural values and influences in independence. Some cultures view independence as not being reliant on outsourcing childcare responsibilities and parents solely raising their children. It is also seen that help from extended family in the area such as from grandparents is often perceived as beneficial and reliable in last minute scenarios. “Things have always worked out to where we
were always available for the children or when not possible my parents would be absolutely willing to step in and kind of take on that caretaker role.” Evidently, many parents leave responsibilities to their partners which allows them to be independent from other aspects of childcare and family life. In a sense this creates a dependency, but a kind that is contributive and not hindering family life and identity.

Many people recognize that being completely independent from help is incredibly challenging. The common proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” highlights the American culture of raising children with more than one person. “Understanding that there’s a, that I, I can’t do everything myself. And so, we have to trust others. So, like my husband will help with lunches.” Though there is a great deal of dependency between partners in many cases, they are still exhibiting independence when looking at the family unit as a whole. In other cases, though some parents were adamant about not having outside help, the majority of families rely on nannies or other forms of childcare. "Not really just the nanny. We don’t have our relatives here. We have some friends that are good. They could assist us, but we live that far outside the margins so it’s for something really important so it’s not a frequent scenario.” These quotes reveal that many people rely on a significant other, extended family, or other forms of outsources care, yet they each discuss the division of child care tasks as a way of retaining independence. Idealy, many people interviewed believed in the importance of being the primary care givers for their children and remaining independent from outside care: “We don’t like leaving them with Anonymous (nanny) for too much of the day. We want to make sure that the girls have enough time with us.” Some parents feel that having a nanny takes away from their connection with their children, however, other families see nannies as a necessity. Depending on the values,
socioeconomic status and habits of each family the idea of outside help for childcare responsibilities greatly changes.

Financial independence for some families presents pros and cons. There are some sacrifices, as there are in raising children in general, that are made clear when financial independency is assessed. "I was not the primary income earner in my household. That kind of had its pluses and negatives so we were able to hire sitters but I couldn’t count on my husband to be home to do like a fair share of child care at all." The primary income earner usually spends less time with the children in the family, but contributes in other respects. If the primary income earner is also the only caregiver, this presents more challenges in the ability to be completely independent in respects of who takes care of the children.

The aforementioned quotes present how families are independent or try to be independent. In some cases, this means a single parent and other cases, this means that the parents provide all the care for the children and do not rely on outside help such as daycares. Some parents feel that their children spending a lot of time with nannies or other caregivers takes away from their bond with their child. Others view outside daycare as against their cultural beliefs. Single mothers try to be independent as much as possible, but this is also very difficult. The dynamics of families with single parents or dual parents is much different and independence has a different meaning between these households. It is interesting to see how families perceive childcare and this is one of the most important aspects of this theme. Some families view daycare and nannies as positive additions to raising their children, whereas some other people and cultures see this as a bad thing. Looking at family background is extremely important when assessing independence because it has so many different meanings and implications.
The multifaceted sub-theme of independence is best understood in multiple scenarios throughout the interviews. Through this acknowledgment of all the aspects of independence, a clearer image of the impact on family life is brought to light in many perspectives. Through cultural familial influences, partnership, and financial capabilities, a robust picture of independent childcare shows its effects on Family Dynamics. Understanding the different definitions of independence to individual families is important in understanding the overarching theme of Family Dynamics.

**Family Bonding**

Family bonding is an experience in which a family comes closer together by spending quality time together. Ideally the children in the family bond to their parents by looking up to them and viewing them as role models. However family bonding can be as simple as disciplining your kids, making food for them, or driving them to school/daycare. Finding this time is a constant struggle for many families who value spending quality time together. Some parents often need to give up more time at work/school, additional income, or accept the addition of a nanny/daycare to look after the children. Throughout all of the interviews, family bonding and the relationships within a developing family (one with children under 10 years old) played a massive role in the dynamics the parents were hoping to create within their family.

Many interviewees shared their struggle with logistically getting enough time with their children. For successful family bonding, it is imperative to build relationships within a family, and this can’t be done if the family is never together. "Me and my husband I guess, spouse, but not in the house during the week he is a graduate student in boulder for weekdays, but he helps out on the weekends." This family exists in an unusual scenario. One of the parents is a graduate
student in Boulder, CO, so he is unable to be at home to spend time with his family during the week. However, the quote explains that he comes home on the weekends to get some quality time with the children. This shows that there is a big spectrum as to how people handle their bond with their family and their balance of work and life. Every family will have challenges in front of them and their own unique route to creating relationships within the family will differ with the values they bring.

In many interviews, the concept of a nanny came up. "It’s not important to us that we have work careers [where] we get to afford a nanny but we’re missing out on having time with our own kids." This interviewee described their internal conflict between bringing in an income to support their family and outsourced care needs, while sacrificing time with their children in the process. Family bonding is about the family coming together and the balance between time at work and time with the child is important for these particular parents. This balance speaks to values of individual parents; their careers and their family bonding. This balance appeared as a source of conflict for many interviewees, some of whom opted to stay at home to raise their children instead of having the entirety of their wages syphoned off to outsourced care.

Certain parents opened up their idea of family bonding to include extended family members. One of the interviews displays this perfectly, “I don’t want them to be like bonded to some person who’s gonna come in and out You know? Like that. This developing time with their grandparents is a good thing. Um, so I don’t feel as guilty (laughs), when I’m at work, as I would if they were with a nanny. I don’t think I could’ve emotionally and financially, I couldn’t have done it with a nanny.” Clearly the interviewee did not want to outsource their day care with nannies because they didn’t want their kids to get used to, and influenced by, people coming and going. Instead of acquiring nannies these parents used their child’s grandparents. This way the
kids are bonding with someone in their family, and parents are still able to accomplish their work and personal responsibilities outside of the home.

Family dynamics appeared in the interviews in several different ways, especially in the decision to balance time/income with work and outsourced care. For those who worked to support the cost of outsourced care, they were able to fulfill their work and personal responsibilities but expressed guilt over missing time with their children. A compromise mentioned by some interviews was to extend the care to other family members in order to ensure familial bonding while simultaneously fulfilling their other responsibilities.

**Gratitude**

After reviewing several interviews, a definition has been derived for how gratitude is being displayed in this ethnographic project. Gratitude has been seen in situations where the interviewee is thankful for the company and help of their spouse. Having a second person that is available to take care of the child while the other parent is unable to has shown to be a crucial part of why some interviewees are grateful. There have also been instances in which interviewees expressed gratitude for the lack of judgment passed by coworkers when they must leave work due to a family emergency.

One of the underlying sub themes within gratitude was gratitude for the interviewee’s spouse. The following quote speaks to this aspect of gratitude: "I think making sure that we work with each other since there are two of us raising the children. So we are very thankful for that. I think about that a lot in terms of people that are a single parent. So I think it’s just working with each other the best we can and so that everyone can sort of have their time." The interviewee is expressing gratitude for the help of her spouse in managing her work/life balance by sharing the
work load at home. Another interviewee expressed this same various of gratitude when speaking about her husband who is away at school during the week: “Well I mean he’s in grad school right now. So like all week he’s in labs and classes and on the weekends he’ll come in on Friday night and he’ll take care of everything all weekend. You know, with the kids and house and dog and car. So that’s a huge help.” Another quote was chosen due to the fact that the interviewee speaks about her husband being a crucial part of the support network that helps her maintain a good work/life balance. “I never had any of my kids in childcare or daycare. I don’t know how that even works. It’s also very expensive, so my family has always helped: my brothers, I have two brothers, my mom, my aunt, my husband, everybody who’s available.” While analyzing the theme of gratitude that was prevalent in the interviews, a specific gratitude for spousal help was seen as a recurring pattern. Gratitude for one’s spouse usually insinuated an interviewee was having an easier time balancing their work and life responsibilities than those interviewees without that spousal support.

Another part of gratitude that was seen was social support. Social support means the support one receives from others outside of their spouse. One interviewee said, “I have a large support system. I think that’s the main thing. That helps me to maintain both work and what is family/work balance. So, having that support system and network of just family, friends, who are always helping.” The interviewee is clearly grateful for their friends and family due to the fact that they help her greatly in maintaining their work/life balance. For those interviewees whos extended family were far away or non existant, many relied of their network of friends to help them: “My friends are super helpful. My daughter is a little old for day care and that stuff. I for sure used day care a lot when she was younger but now she just goes to school all day so that makes it easier. My friends are great with her, I have them babysit sometimes.”
A final aspect of gratitude that was seen came from a lack of judgment from coworkers. One interviewee said, "I think people in general are super supportive at DU and I think that's really helpful. Whether or not they have children, they all kind of understand that life happens." This lack of judgement from co-workers was understood to encompass times when interviewees had to leave work or reschedule meetings in order to take care of their children. This lack of judgment allowed parents to navigate both spheres of their responsibilities without adding an additional stressor of colleague disapproval.

Gratitude for spousal support, social support, and co-worker understanding all appeared as aspects of gratitude in the interviews. Spousal and social support allowed interviewees to better balance their work responsibilities because other networks were able to provide care for their children. The same is true in the inverse for the gratitude of co-workers; their understanding allowed interviewees to take care of their home responsibilities without feeling that their work responsibilities were not being handled. Gratitude was derived from situations where the interviewee was thankful for external support in their lives. If this support was not present, the interviewees would not be able to maintain a good work/life balance.

**Cultural Values**

Cultural values are the social norms, beliefs, meanings, and practices that inform Family Dynamics. They set the standards for how family members interact, what they can expect from one another. During our interviews, the subjects often reflected on their cultural values in relation to child rearing and their work/life balance.

One of the first instances that came up occurred when an interviewee began talking about the hardships that she faces and how her husband and her cope. After calling raising kids
"meditation" she continued, "So that's one way it's kind of like a practice it's getting-getting to be better people. That's how we deal with it." The way that an interviewee rationalized the struggles that she faced while raising children was that it was a practice in becoming a better person by serving someone other than one’s self. This rationalization reflects an assumption in American culture that a parent's identity comes from dedication to their child. Children often become the center of a familial unit that expands to the extended family.

This valuation of children does not always expand past family, and institutions may not place employee’s children in such an esteemed position. Though an interviewee's coworkers at DU are extremely accepting of the needs of her children, she recalled, "at my previous institution it was a Mid-Western institution and it was far less acceptable to mention kids or have kids be in your life at all. So I do have a sense that academia isn’t really comfortable with it yet my department has been really friendly and bringing their own kids to you know, the end of year faculty gathering or whatever you know it is." Traveling through different institutions, the interviewee noticed that the cultural valuation of children was vastly different in-between schools/ regions. In the East Coast, talking about children in the workplace was extremely taboo as well as in another mid-western institution. This impacted her ability to take time off for family emergencies and made her work/life balance more difficult.

One of the cultural values that an interviewee viewed as having a profound effect in the workplace is gender. She speculated, "I think there's a residual gender thing where it was the dads who were the professors so they never had that problem, they had a wife at home so it's a gender thing." Cultural values inform gender roles, which an interviewee explained, have a significant effect on the socio-economic expectations of professors. She argued that because the cultural awareness of the demands of being a parent and working as a professor had not caught
up with the reality, that mothers and fathers alike are now both working and raising kids, professors are unduly being expected to have the resources to raise kids with very little support.

As mentioned before cultural values are the social norms, beliefs, meanings, and practices that inform Family Dynamics. Some of these aspects that families form do not translate well into maintaining a work/life balance. The cultural values that some families form do not always match up with the culture of a working environment. The crossroad of the workplace environment and raising children is inseparable from cultural values because both areas are so integral to the social functioning of communities and families.

**Outsourcing care**

One of the themes our group found is outsourcing care, which is when parents seek help from someone to help care for their children. This can involve grandparents, family members, relatives, or nannies. In cases where parents are separated and live in different homes, seeking help from the other parent could also apply as a form of outsourcing care.

Today parents usually both have responsibilities in their workplace, meaning many parents are both in full-time jobs, due to higher economic demands. As a result, they often spend most of their time at their places of work. Many of those parents then necessarily have less time with their children, and less time to provide childcare. In response to this, outsourcing care has become increasingly popular for many families. After conducting this research we came up with two distinct categories that are most common amongst parents for outsourcing care; family reliance and paid agencies.

Some people work near their families and may have relatives near them who can assist them in child care while parents are at work. To these people, childcare centers were considered
to be too expensive and unnecessary thanks to their familial support. One interviewee explained: “My husband’s sister Sandy is living in town She is really nice and we are very close .... I don’t see how people would do it if they were new to the city and they don’t have that support network.” Our data indicates a high reliance on family members and close relatives, as childcare centers are getting more expensive and less available due to large waiting lists. Another interviewee discussed these high expenses, saying, 

“(laughs) yes, definitely we had to pay for childcare, very expensive especially because they were all back to back....Basically if you were doing a little bit better [than the poverty line]...the state thinks that you don't need help financially...so in order to continue in the program either my husband and I had to split up, and then if we were to separate I would have to file child support against him, just to get help from the state.”

It is difficult to get in such programs, as our interviewee shared, in the first place. And once in, continuing with the high costs provide impossible. She later explained that her parents moved closer to them, and they rely one hundred percent on them with taking care of their children now.

However many of our interviewees do not have the comfort of close family members who live near their homes, and those individuals will often resort to hiring a private nanny, or enroll their children in childcare centers: “Um, we hire a private nanny who comes to our house. Yeah, we couldn’t get in the childcare here at DU. They have a lottery system which was really frustrating because that would be the perfect scenario for us to have her here. So that would be um. You know when I was first hired here I was told that DU offers childcare, so I was assuming ok there would be no problem.” This interviewee shared the struggle of getting into the DU childcare center, which would be ideal for an employee of the University. This frustration has been consistent throughout our interviews. Being unable to get into Fisher forced families to outsource other child care in other ways: "Not really just the nanny. We don’t have our relatives here.” This was a common response. When staying at home or utilizing the University’s
childcare was not an option, most families outsource care to nannies or other childcare programs in the city.

From the observations, we can conclude that work responsibilities are forcing many individuals to outsource their childcare. This may mean extended family and friends, nannies, or formal childcare programs. Because of this demand for outsourcing care, many parents have less time with their children and their work/life balance becomes slightly skewed.

**Partnership Equality**

Within the overarching theme of Family Dynamics lies a sub-theme entitled Partnership Equality. Partnership is defined as the allocation of childcare, housework, and income earning responsibilities between the interviewee and their spouse. In some families, especially single mother households, this may also include the participation of other adults such as grandparents, boyfriends, ex-spouses, and babysitters. Many interviewees acknowledged that sharing childcare and housework duties is a necessity to maintaining a good work/life balance, but the way that families approach this varies. The equality of these partnerships is determined by how much time each parent contributes to these three tasks and how equal the parents feel their partnership is. For example, a partnership may be balanced even if one partner does the majority of childcare and housework because the other partner takes on the responsibility of money-making for the family.

One defining characteristic of a partnership is the need for a source of income for the family. This income can be generated by one partner or by both. Given that the concept of the single earner household has been highly contested in the area of partnership equality, our research attempts to introduce another perspective to the issue. In American culture, the ideal
family consists of a breadwinning father and a homemaking mother. Nevertheless, recent social and economic changes have led to an increase in “non-traditional” American families, and many have begun to question the equality and feasibility of single earner households. However one must not simply go off of assumptions, but also consider whether the partners see their relationship and allocation of tasks as equal.

It is important to note that our qualitative research limits our ability to represent partnership equality with quantitative data such as the distribution of work hours per week. For the purpose of our study however we will assume that these partnerships are equal, as reported, and focus our analysis on the ways in which partners divide up responsibilities and tasks.

A key attribute of single income households is evident in the interview of one interviewee whose spouse is a surgeon. In the interview she states, “I would say that in a month he probably does maybe one pickup. So, I probably do more than 90% of the pickups and drop-offs.” She goes on to say that her spouse leaves for work at 4 am every day and arrives back home at 7pm. Their partnership has established a way of sharing responsibilities whereby one partner focuses on generating income for the family and the other on household duties and childcare. This is their negotiation of equal partnership. In another interview, a male interviewee mentioned that it is difficult to find ways to designate tasks, yet “it is helpful that my wife only works part time so she takes care of our daughter for most of the day while I am in class or doing work.” From both of these examples one can see that the flexibility of the mother’s time is imperative when the father’s work schedule is demanding and inflexible.

In contrast, many other interviewees said they and their spouse split up childcare, housework, and income earning responsibilities evenly. This situation is common where both partners have jobs, thus requiring both partners to participate in childcare and housework as well.
One parent described it as “teamwork” with her spouse, "my husband and I tag team everything. You know one works on dinner and one works on bed-time we both work on um you know getting them out of the door in the morning (chuckles)... it’s totally a joint effort.” In another interview, an interviewee stated, “So my husband is really hands on. Like it’s, I have no complaint about that. He’s always taking care of our child so we do have this equal partnership.” In both of these cases the interviewee clearly appreciates their partner’s contributions not only to income earning activities but also to housework and childcare responsibilities.

Another key feature of dual earner households is the need for parents to alternate childcare shifts. It seems that many parents distribute childcare and housework much like one does when running a relay race. As the mother returns home from work, her husband grabs the torch, leaving the children with her and running off to work. As one interviewee pointed out, she and her husband wanted to take care of the children themselves and therefore had to adjust their schedules creatively. She explained, “[s]o he has switched his work schedule around so that I am here sort of when I need to be in the daytime and then he's working and then I go home and then he goes out and works.” This allocation of responsibilities throughout the day likely permits these parents to achieve a better work/life balance.

The characteristics of single mother households have increasingly become an area of interest in the subject of work/life balance. With this family dynamic, there is one parent who serves as the sole caregiver, homemaker, and income earner of the family. In order to maintain a form of balance in the midst of these demands, single mothers often partner with an ex-husband, boyfriend, extended family member, or nanny. In these cases, the focus is less on a partnership between two people, but rather on the mother’s partnership with a village of people who help her with childcare and housework duties. One single mother mentioned the ways in which her ex-
husband and boyfriend help take care of her daughter. “She is with me the majority of the time. She usually sleeps at my house and all that stuff. But her dad is in Denver too so they spend a bunch of time together especially when I’m busy.” The interviewee goes on to say that having her boyfriend live with her and her daughter has also been a helpful support system. Another interviewee stated, “I’m a single mother so I have a lot of people helping me while I’m in class or working,” pointing to the ways in which single mothers partner with a multitude of people within their community to achieve a better balance between work and childcare duties.

In summary there are three types of partner equality strategies that parents employ. The first and least common is the “ideal American family” where the father is the primary income earner and the mother is the primary caregiver. Nevertheless, most interviewees that fall under this category still feel that they have equal partnerships because responsibilities are allocated in a balanced and specialized way. In many cases, the father’s job has extremely demanding work hours that prohibited him from participating in childcare and housework related tasks. The second and most common strategy is employed by parents where both have income earning jobs. In these partnerships, the strategy consists of dividing up housework, childcare, and income earning activities equally between partners. In these instances, both partners take on tasks within the home often while the other partner is at work and then switching off. Lastly, single mothers take on a third strategy of partnership in order to manage primary income duties with childcare and housework responsibilities. They do so by utilizing non-traditional partnerships with ex-husbands, boyfriends, family members, and nannies to maintain a good work/life balance. All in all, the majority of these partnerships are seen as equal by the partners themselves and each family type strives to allocate tasks in a way permits a healthy work/life balance.
Subgroup: staff

In reference to this project, “staff” are a particular interviewee group that expresses a different set of commitments and circumstances in relation to childcare than the faculty and student interviewees. This was seen through their relatively adaptive positions and unique workplace dynamics which puts them in situations that are unique to their employment status. We found three categories distinctly associated with staff for this project; “blurred” work boundaries, issues of job insecurity, and flexible work schedules. Staff reported that their work/life balance was more “blurred” than other interviewees because it is often more acceptable to bring home life into the work space. This included bringing children to their offices and often having to leave abruptly for family emergencies such as a sick child or a parent/teacher conference. In the same respect, it is common for staff to bring their work responsibilities home, often finishing up projects while away from their office, as they are often have more self-defined deadlines. This makes it more difficult to separate home life and work life leading to the “blurred” work boundaries category that was observed by interviewers.

Another component unique to the staff interviews was the fear or hesitation of speaking critically of DU policies due to lack of permanency in staff positions. This observation was more sub-textual and viewed by the interviewing team rather than direct quotes from interviews. It is assumed that this is because most DU staff do not have the same tenured positions or more permanent work status as faculty and therefore would not want to risk their positions by speaking critically about things such as the short maternity leaves and lack of access to Fischer daycare center. They would rather seek alternative child care options than advocate for more satisfactory one’s through the University due to this fear of work repercussions or even losing their position altogether.
The scheduling of both the staff and the staff’s partner was also important as their level of flexibility determined how the staff distributes child care responsibilities in their everyday life. Though this is not uncommon among other interviewees, staff reported more flexibility than was observed by other interviewees. Because so much of their work/life balance is “blurred,” they are able to take on more household responsibilities than a faculty or student who may have a more set and rigid schedule with a less child-friendly work environment.

**Family Dynamics Conclusion**

Family dynamics, meaning the many internal-familial relationships that derive from cultural, financial, and work and life obstacles, is an essential theme for this ethnographic study. Because the goal of our project is to better understand the relationship between personal life and work responsibilities for parents within different departments of the University of Denver, understanding commonalities and problems that permeate through “family dynamics” will is an extremely important part of this study. After analyzing the preliminary steps of the research process as a group, our section broke “family dynamic” down into 7 different subthemes: immigration status, independence, family bonding, gratitude, cultural values, outsourcing care, and partnership equality. All 7 of these subthemes held major importance for our primary project goal of understanding the relationship between work and personal life.

Any small variable in a given family’s dynamics can have a major effect on the way they go about their everyday life in terms of balancing the family and the professional parts of life. Immigration status is one of these variables that have a profound effect on the problems that an immigrant family may encounter. Besides the direct problems posed to immigrants from United State’s legislation and immigration laws, immigration status has a serious influence in day-to-
day family life, as seen through beliefs on appropriate childcare resources and the absence of close extended family. In conclusion, it is extremely important for an institution like DU to understand a worker, student, or faculty’s immigration status to provide them with necessary social and personal assistance.

Allowing a family to operate as they prefer fosters their ability to maintain “independence,” which is our next subtheme within “family dynamics.” Cultural factors and money seem to be the biggest indicators behind a given family’s independence. For some families, having greater income has enabled them to find good childcare services for their infant, giving them a greater degree of independence in comparison to a poorer family with parent(s) working more hours a week, giving them less free time to. Other families, like the Korean immigrant family example used throughout this theme, have cultural preconceptions born from their childhood experiences that sway them away from resources like nannies or babysitters. A given family’s independence, whether born from cultural or financial preconditions, are very important to understanding the families involved in our study.

Family bonding is an overlooked subtheme in family dynamics that is extremely important for a family’s emotional and fundamental growth. Simple, everyday interactions between parents and their children have resounding effects on the growth and maturity of all family members, and difficulty in balancing work and life responsibilities can make these vital familial interactions hard to come by. In the example interview in the family bonding section, we see how a family with a grad-student father has trouble making time for these family moments, leaving the work load on his wife throughout the week. A lack of positive family bonding can have serious negative effects on the family and the personal growth of each individual member, which is a concept that should be regularly considered within academic institutions.
Gratitude, which is our next subtheme, is the result of being able to practice a positive work/family life balance. The subjects in our study exhibited gratitude for many different life experiences, from being thankful for being able to spend time with their family, to being grateful that their child was able to enter a childcare program when others were not. The most important aspect of understanding “gratitude,” then, is understanding why some subjects lacked gratitude, and therefore displayed frustrations with the university. A major reoccurring theme was frustration with not being able to get into the DU daycare facility, and if we break down commonalities like this we can begin to highlight the weaknesses employees identified in regard to DUs support of their work/life balance.

“Cultural values,” our next subtheme, are very important to understand when analyzing the way a family reacts to certain support systems the university offers. A major commonality between the subjects who had systematic problems with the school was the fact that they were interacting with a system that wasn’t sympathetic to the family’s cultural needs. For example, some subjects came from a culture where using a babysitter or child support is seen as bad parenting, leaving them vulnerable to the American society that doesn’t share the same social and cultural viewpoints. If any institution like DU wants to move forward and progress toward a better employee support system, it will need to recognize the cultural differences in their labor force and try and appeal to their needs.

Our next subtheme, “outsourcing care,” highlights many issues that permeate between many other subthemes within “family dynamics”. Not only does idea of outsourced care fit directly into the discussion of cultural norms, it also has direct implications as to how a given family manages to balance their time and work-life responsibilities. Some subjects revealed problems simply trying to enter systems of child support where they could outsource some of the
necessary care, and others simply rejected the idea based on cultural and social dispositions. Overall, this subtheme was extremely revealing of certain problems evident in our institution’s current system.

“Partnership equality,” our final subtheme is very important for understanding how many familial problems begin in the domestic setting. It highlighted the importance of distributing specific roles between parents and other care givers. This subtheme not only showed the significance of work responsibility and how it creeps into regular family-life, but it also highlighted the importance of supporting faculty and other employees who are operating within a one-parent household. This subgroup is very vulnerable – especially when trying to balance care for a child under the age of 10 – and they should be a top priority for institutions like DU moving forward.

Overall, Family Dynamics is extremely important for understanding where many of the familial problems we are trying to address in this study come from. Moving forward, DU needs to continue the investigation of each one of the subthemes presented with family dynamics, and continue learning how they can further support of the vulnerable subgroups highlighted above.