

FRANTIC FATHERS AND MISPLACED MOTHERS: HEGEMONIC
PATRIARCHAL REINFORCEMENT OF THE
TRADITIONAL FAMILY IN
AMERICAN FILM

by

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ABSTRACT

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Movies play an integral part in the formation of cultural identity and therefore should be subject to critical examination. This study examines the roles of mothers and fathers in films by looking at several basic techniques used to reinforce patriarchy. The focus will be an examination of post-1990s Hollywood film with relevant background information coming from earlier Hollywood films.

Films which ridicule fathers who try to take on traditional female roles are first examined. In these films it is necessary for a woman to come in and rescue the man by embracing the role she was “intended” for. Another popular discourse uses comedy in

ridiculing fathers who take on the role of caregiver, but in these films, the father successfully navigates this traditionally female terrain. Patriarchy is reinforced by illustrating that men can still be men and take on the traditional female roles as well. In a backlash against feminism, fathers successfully navigate and take on the role of childcare. The next focus is films that continue in the “Fathers Knows Best” tradition, showing that men can become better mothers, but along with a commendation of the father comes a condemnation of the mother. The 1990s began to slowly usher in an age of telling fathers that though they had been successful in all areas, it was time to slow down. The 1950s instilled in fathers the need to be the family breadwinner, leaving the mother responsible for the care of the home. Now that we have been told that fathers can be as good at parenting as mothers, it is time to tell that career oriented father that he is needed on the home front. In other films, the father remains a strong caregiver, but in essence, “it takes a village” to raise a family successfully. These films give examples of group parenting or step-parenting. Hegemony seeks to allow dominant values to be enforced without the knowledge of the oppressed. It is imperative to understand how hegemony works through film in order to educate filmgoers in how to identify the values that are reinforced.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When a trailer for Cheaper by the Dozen (2003) starring Steve Martin and Bonnie Hunt hit the big screen in late 2003, I, along with my half dozen children, were looking forward to seeing it. My reasons for looking forward to this film included the fact that I had read the text, Cheaper by the Dozen, written by Frank and Ernestine Gilbreth, and had enjoyed the story immensely. I looked forward to watching the antics of a large family, especially since I had been living a version of that life myself with children ranging from eight to twenty-two keeping my ever chaotic life hopping at a rather frantic pace. I know what it's like to try to cook a meal with several screaming toddlers trying to climb up your legs. I can sympathize with the mom that has baby spit-up slowly oozing down her t-shirt which is already decorated with bits of peanut butter and jelly. I also know what it is like to be a full time stay at home mom that desperately yearns for her former career or even just a hint of adult conversation.

Lillian Gilbreth, the mother of the Cheaper By the Dozen clan, was an inspiration for me. Here was the classic woman who could have it all, the career, the marriage, and the children, and nothing seemed to suffer from her lack of attention. Lillian was a dynamo of her time, a trail-blazer for women of later generations. She

had a bachelors and masters degree in literature and a doctorate in psychology. She was the first woman member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers as well as a professor of management and engineering at Purdue University. And, in her spare time, she was the mother to twelve children that she and her husband raised, without outside help, and with great success. The book written by two of her children, Ernestine and Frank, is a loving tribute to the family that was created by Frank and Lillian Gilbreth.

Naturally, I was looking forward to taking my children to see this story of a large family with a professional mother, and with Steve Martin in the lead male role, it was sure to be a hoot. I had visions of searching the book cases and dusting off that old copy of Cheaper by the Dozen and having the kids read it. Finally, a contemporary movie that would illuminate the possibilities of raising a large family while still allowing the mother to maintain a professional career, a movie that would not criticize the mother for wanting a job outside the home, a movie that would show how any family, even a large family, could work out the day to day intricacies of a busy and full life for all members.

It was with great disappointment mixed with a great deal of anger that I sat through the 2003 version of Cheaper by the Dozen. Instead of a supportive and functioning family, what we find on the screen is a mother who has to sacrifice everything and stay home to take care of her children and a college graduate father who can't seem to even make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on his own. I got

the message loud and clear, the entire movie was shouting the reinforcement of the age old patriarchal cry; mothers belong at home taking care of their children. But, even more frightening was the fact that I seemed to be a lone wolf crying in the wilderness. Nobody heard it, it seemed, except me. My children chided me for being overly-analytical and reading too much into it. “It’s just a comedy, Mom! Let it go, it was funny!” Others just looked at me quizzically, with a look of dull amusement in their eyes and humored me by listening, though obviously without the passion or anger that I had hoped to engender. I was left with a dreadful fear that this phenomenon would be unnoticed, that keeping mothers at home would continue to be naturalized and normalized, a part of the social contract. The germ of this dissertation was born to look more closely at the role of hegemony and just how big a part the movies can play in teaching us how to live.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA

2.1 Movies as Storytellers

Motion pictures have been one of the primary story-tellers of our society for most of the past century. Much like the bards and scops of antiquity, story-tellers reinforce social values by choosing what to tell, how to tell it, and what to focus on. It is the story-teller that determines what is highly esteemed and what is considered moral or immoral. This is accomplished by the art of story telling. The story tells the listener what is good and what is bad, what is heroic and what is weak, what is to be valued and what is to be despised. In discussing the importance of story-telling to a society, Brian Godawa writes:

Since the beginning of time, humankind has used story to convey the meaning and purpose of life. Within its various forms (myth, fable, parable, allegory), and within its development from oral tradition to codification, storytelling has through the eons been the backbone of civilizations. It has maintained ritual, systematized beliefs and taught dogma. In essence, story incarnates the myths and values of a culture with the intent of perpetuating them. (26)

Such is the power of a story and this was my fear. If the story tellers of our generation continued to “systematize beliefs” and “teach dogma” as Godawa suggests, exactly what were the beliefs and dogma that we were being fed? And, exactly where were the stories coming from and who was telling them? It doesn’t take too much investigation to realize that the “stories” people hear today no longer come from an oral passing on of tradition, and indeed, no longer come from the written word and books. Today, our stories come primarily in the form of motion pictures and television. Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt, Jr. make this link between story telling and film by writing:

Our ancestors gathered to tell stories, sing songs, and play with images and shadows; we go to the movies. The movie theater serves as our collective dream space, the place where we moderns encounter images and narratives of superhuman beings, otherworldly creatures, heroic figures, and the full range of possible human destinies. In our need for such images and stories, we are like our ancestors, seeking deeper meaning and patterns. (65)

Brian Godawa further explains not only the importance of storytelling, but also justifies the story that is meant to instruct or teach the audience. He writes:

From the Greek tragedies of Euripides to the bawdy comedies of Shakespeare, both ancient and classical writers suffered no shame in telling a good story with the intention of proving a point or illustrating

how they believed we ought to live in this world. Storytelling from its inception was expected to be more than entertainment. Through their craft, the first storytellers were expected to teach the culture how to live and behave in their world. (40)

Annalee R. Ward further expounds on the importance of storytelling to a society while also establishing the relationship between storytelling and contemporary film.

Storytelling is vital to every society as a way of searching for and sharing truth, but the role of storyteller in culture has changed, affecting what is told. Today, popular film has become a central storyteller for contemporary culture. It communicates myths and fairy tales, entertains, and educates the audience for better or worse.

(Mouse Morality 1)

2.2 Movies and Myth

Linking movies to myth is significant in establishing the potential importance of the effect of movies on society. An initial working definition is helpful in making clear the power of myth. Joel W. Martin represents myth as, “Myth consists of stories that provide human communities with grounding prototypes, models for life, reports of foundational realities, and dramatic presentations of fundamental values: Myth reveals a culture’s bedrock assumptions and aspirations” (6). Having established the power of myth, Godawa goes on to explain how myth and film are related as he writes, “The very nature of moviemaking and moviegoing itself

incarnates the sacred transmission of myth, much as occurred for the ancients” (27).

Geoffrey Hill describes what he sees as the mythic experience of movie-going:

As ironic modern worshippers we congregate at the cinematic temple.
We pay our votive offerings at the box office. We buy our ritual corn.
We hush in reverent anticipation as the lights go down and the
celluloid magic begins. Throughout the filmic narrative we identify
with the hero. We vilify the antihero. We vicariously exult in the
victories of the drama. And we are spiritually inspired by the moral of
the story, all while believing we are modern techno-secular people,
devoid of religion. Yet the depth and intensity of our participation
reveal a religious fervor that is not much different from that of
religious zealots. (3)

It would be remiss in a discussion of myth to not mention Joseph Campbell, one of the most well-renowned scholars of mythology and the author of The Hero with a Thousand Faces and The Power of Myth. According to Joel W. Martin, Campbell also believed that cinema held the power of myth. Martin writes, “Campbell talked about the ability of popular films such as Star Wars to perform the same function as ancient myth, which is to provide a means for human beings to experience and find meaning and significance in life” (68). Martin continues to discuss how films operate as myth, “Popular movies are cultural standard-bearer; they carry with them the values, beliefs, dreams, desires, longings, and the needs of a

society and thus, can function mythologically” (68). If we accept the premise of myth and story telling as determiners and progenitors of society’s values and beliefs and further understand the lineage of modern motion pictures originating from the ancient oral traditions, then it seems imperative that we examine what our modern storytellers in the form of cinema are telling us about our own societal values and beliefs. As John Leyden advises, “We must seek to understand the message of popular-culture products before we can identify areas of agreement or disagreement with them” (35). It is important therefore, to understand not only the power of the cinema, but to also decipher exactly what it is the cinema is teaching.

2.3 Impact of film

Do you know that we are playing to the world? What we film tomorrow will strike the hearts of the world. And they will know what we are saying. We’ve gone beyond Babel, beyond words. We’ve found a universal language—a power that can make men brothers and end wars forever. Remember that, remember that when you go before the camera. [David Wark Griffith, 1914] (May 25)

It is this story teller, then, that through the process of hegemony, allows the reinforcement of dominant American values and institutions. In researching this question of the importance of motion pictures on societal values and motives, I have identified four overlapping and yet distinct areas predominately under discussion: the influence of media on the individual and society; how media acts to reinforce

ideology; ways that the media merely reflects reality; and how media, motion pictures in particular, can act as a type of secular religion in affecting the way people think and act.

In a discussion of the influence of film on society, I believe it is important to consider two key points; how film operates in order to create influence and exactly what kinds of influence and in what areas film creates influence. Looking first at what types of influence seem most predominant in film, I will examine three key areas; cultural construction, socialization, and education. Then, in looking more closely at how film influence operates, I will examine the roles of hegemony, discursive transcoding, the unconscious influence, and the function of pleasure in film.

2.4 Types of Influence

2.4.1 Cultural Construction

Many critics argue that film can have an impact on cultural construction through the imposition and reinforcement of values. I.C. Jarvie, one of the seminal writers on film theory and social psychology, concedes that movies can influence certain values and beliefs, though he does not completely accept the proposition that movies legitimate social values. In Movies as Social Criticism: Aspects of Their Social Psychology, he writes, “Connected with legitimation is the tendency movies have to confer status on what they portray. Values and mores can be shown as unremarkable or even admirable and hence have their status enhanced” (131). Jarvie

goes on to note that “movies also can withdraw status [...] Values can be undermined as well as reinforced” (131). Putting it much more strongly, John Belton writes of cultural identity formation, “The movies play a crucial role in its [American culture’s] construction, in its representation/re-presentation, and in its transmission” (1). Graeme Turner agrees and says that “key movies become part of our personal culture, our identity. Film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself” (Film as Social Practice 3). Further cementing this argument of films power over culture, Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr. writes that “films are one of the most effective cultural vehicles for expressing beliefs and values, for they operate at once on the mythic and the ideological levels, both affecting consumers unconsciously and consciously promoting or reflecting a particular value system” (155). Finally, Henry A. Giroux gives the most compelling and straightforward argument on film influence when he writes, “Films do more than entertain, they offer up subject positions, mobilize desires, influence us unconsciously, and help to construct the landscape of American culture” (3). If, then, films play such a major role in constructing and maintaining American social values and beliefs, the imperative for understanding this influence is made more clear.

2.4.2 Socialization

Film influences not only cultural values and beliefs, but also has a profound impact on individual socialization. Some of the many influences that film is said to

have on the individual include aiding in identity formation, shaping behavior, teaching the basics of how to live and helping with the understanding of the world around us. In a larger context, film is also accused of manipulating public opinion and contributing to social reform measures as well as acting as a surrogate for community interaction.

Henry A. Giroux argues the influence of films on culture and continues his argument on identity construction. He writes, “Unlike ordinary consumer items, film produces images, ideas, and ideologies that shape both individual and national identities” (6). Elaine Berland and Marilyn Wechter agree and see this identity construction as part of the preservation of patriarchal society. “Films are a powerful site for the production, transformation and maintenance of traditional cultural notions of identity” (35). In addition to contributing to identity formation, film influence can shape behaviors in ways ranging from hairstyles and fashion fads to modes of behavior. This is, according to Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, in part based on representations. “One’s being is thus shaped by the representations of oneself and of the world that one holds, and one’s life can be described in terms of the figures or shapes which social life assumes as a result of the representations that prevail in a culture” (12). These behaviors may be those concerned with everyday habits, “Perhaps more in the trivia of everyday—how to dress with taste, to conduct oneself in social situation, to react to crises, and so on” (Jarvie 22). Douglas Kellner specifies some of these behaviors when he writes, “Moreover, films became a major

force of socialization, providing role models and instruction in dress and fashion, in courtship and love, and in marriage and career” (354).

Beyond simply providing a backdrop of information regarding dress, fashion, and behavior, film influence also provides an understanding of the world. “Simply put, the images in movies and television simultaneously contribute to our understanding of what social reality is and to the universal conception of what the world is like—or ought to be like. In this sense, cultural representations or images might be said to sustain or undermine social institutions” (Pratt 42). This same power to “sustain or undermine social institutions” can also be used to steer public opinion or as an apparatus of social reform. Henry A. Giroux claims this power for film by writing, “The other relationship occurs on the big screen where film content serves as an instrument for propaganda, as an agent for social change, and as a manipulator of public opinion” (Breaking In To the Movies 3). Elizabeth G. Traube draws on the Frankfurt School and Althusserian-Lacanian model to make this same argument. “mass culture appears as an instrument for ideological manipulation, a form of social control through which false or inauthentic beliefs are reinforced and inculcated in audiences” (4).

If film has this power to influence and manipulate the public, then, as explained by John Belton, it can also be used as an “instrument of social reform” (17). Belton goes back to the Motion Picture Production Code established in 1934 and illuminates how this code, originally conceived as a form of providing

“wholesome” entertainment via censorship, instead was also used as a form of social control.

More than any other text, the Production Code dramatizes the potential power of the cinema as an instrument of social reform—at least as it was perceived by religious and other civic organizations concerned with public morality. [...] the Production Code established the boundaries for on-screen behavior from 1930 to the mid-1950s when the code was successfully challenged by independent filmmakers who sought to bring a new, more adult content to the screen. (17)

Stephen Powers, David J. Rothman and Stanley Rothman bring into the argument the added factor that in many cases the moviemakers themselves intend through their art to influence social reform. “A very substantial majority of moviemakers explicitly affirm their belief that motion pictures should encourage social reform” (5). And, it seems, this is what the public would like to see films accomplish. According to Powers, Rothman and Rothman, “fully 67 percent of those we interviewed in our sample explicitly state that they believe movies should contribute to social reform” (77).

To summarize, film influence aids in identity formation, shapes behavior, teaches ways to live, helps with an understanding of the world, as well as becomes a

potential manipulator of public opinion and mechanism of social reform. Peter Biskind sums up the influence of cinema in a succinct and clear manner by stating:

It has never been much of a secret, in other words, that movies influence manners, attitudes, and behavior. In the fifties, they told us how to dress for a rumble or a board meeting, how far to go on the first date, what to think about Martians or, closer to home, Jews, blacks, and homosexuals. They taught girls whether they should have husbands or careers, boys whether to pursue work or pleasure. They told us what was right and what was wrong, what was good and what was bad; they defined our problems and suggested solutions. And they still do. (2)

One last aspect of film influence and socialization to be mentioned is that of providing a forum of community for moviegoers. Jarvie suggests that films have become a “replacement for the lost bonds of genuine community” (xii). Richard Dyer’s model of the appeal of entertainment forms found in Table 5.2 of Only Entertainment, includes a description of a utopian solution for entertainment which incorporates community as an appeal of entertainment. (26) Conversely, he lists the social tension or inadequacy that is resolved by this sense of community which includes things like “job mobility, rehousing and development, high-rise flats” (26). Jackie Stacey, writing on the British cinema but still applicable to American cinema as well, includes this sense of belonging as a significant factor of pleasure in the

cinema experience. She explains, “The connectedness to others through shared cultural consumption extends beyond the cinema itself and into everyday practices associated with cinema-going. Discussion of Hollywood and its stars at work and at home was one of the pleasures of the cinema frequently recalled” (436). Stacey also notes that this pleasure of community met a societal need, “This sense of community and of togetherness clearly broke down feelings of isolation and offered a sense of self with a collective meaning” (436).

2.4.3 Education

The process of educating through film has many different areas open for consideration. The most direct form of education and film would naturally be the documentary style film, news film, or films put together primarily for educational use. These are the rather obvious ways of educating through film. Less obvious, but equally powerful, are films intended and marketed as entertainment, and it is these types of films to which I will be referring in this section. Jonathan Rosenbaum explains that entertainment can and does influence how people think when he writes, “[...] but my main purpose here and elsewhere in this book is to argue that what is designed to make people feel good at the movies has a profound relation to how and what they think and feel about the world around them” (3).

Closely related to the concept that many filmmakers believe their films should contribute to social reform is the idea that filmmakers also believe in the pedagogical power of motion pictures. “Many of the filmmakers see their work as a

form of education, as well as entertainment, and use the freedom of the post-studio structure of the industry to try to convey strong political or social messages in one way or another, at the same time that they try to turn a profit” (Powers, Rothman and Rothman 77). Speaking from the point of view of the audience, bell hooks says, “And even though most folks will say that they go to movies to be entertained, if the truth be told lots of us, myself included, go to movies to learn stuff. Often what we learn is life-transforming in some way” (2). Later in her argument, hook specifies some of what she believes students learn from movie-going.

Whether we like it or not, cinema assumes a pedagogical role in the lives of many people. [...] I began to realize that my students learned more about race, sex, and class for movies than from all the theoretical literature I was urging them to read. Movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex, and class, they provide a shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these charged issues. (2)

Henry A. Giroux acknowledges this pedagogical function and argues very strongly about the role of cinema in the lives of children. He argues that “media culture, has become a substantial, if not the primary, educational force in regulating the meanings, values, and tastes that set the norms that offer up and legitimate particular subject positions” (The Mouse that Roared 2-3). He goes on to emphasize that large blocks of media time are consumed by both adults and children and

reiterates his previous argument about the need for critical analysis of what is being taught. Giroux describes his personal encounter with the pedagogical effects of Disney on his then eight year old sons. He says that he came to realize that:

animated films operate on many registers, but one of the most persuasive is the role they play as the new 'teaching machines.' [...] these films inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals than more traditional sites of learning such as the public schools, religious institutions, and the family. ("Animating Youth" 2)

Giroux argues that the media culture has a huge pedagogical influence on the young, but also on adults and world policy. He quotes Michael Eisner, the then CEO of Disney:

But it may not be such an exaggeration to appreciate the role of the American entertainment industry in helping to change history. The Berlin Wall was destroyed not by the force of Western arms but by the force of Western ideas. And what was the delivery system for those ideas? It has to be admitted that to an important degree it was by American entertainment. (The Mouse that Roared 28)

Giroux extrapolates from Eisner's speech that as head of a major media conglomerate, Eisner is acknowledging the power and force of the entertainment industry. Henry A. Giroux focuses his many writings on Disney in looking at the

potentially negative effects, mostly aimed at children. In reviews printed on the back cover of The Mouse that Roared, The Times Literary Supplement writes that Giroux, “Aims to expose the cultural manipulations of global corporate capitalism, as embodied by the Disney Corporation, and its allegedly malign effects on children and families.” However, as others point out, all pedagogical effects are not necessarily negative. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin point out that: “[...] by studying American film history, we can gain keen insights into the ways that different groups of American people have been treated (and continue to be treated). Images of people on film actively contribute to the ways in which people are understood and experienced in the ‘real world’” (3).

Film can open up new worlds and expose viewers to many different ways of life. Without having the ability to actually live a different life, viewers can experience in a small way a life totally unlike their own. bell hooks refers to this ability as “border crossing” and writes, “Movies remain the perfect vehicle for the introduction of certain ritual rites of passage that come to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing for everyone who wants to take a look at difference and the different without having to experientially engage ‘the other’” (2).

One last positive force of the educational use of films is educating the public about political issues and current events. John Belton states that, “American film has always performed a journalistic function, informing the populace about current events” (8). Belton uses specific examples of films such as *The China Syndrome*

(1979) which educated people about the “hazardous conditions within contemporary nuclear power plants” and Wall Street (1987) which “looked at the ruthless practice of insider trading in the New York stock market” (8). Other more contemporary films which perform the same type of function range from animated children’s musicals to serious drama including titles like, Happy Feet (2006), which though an animated film packs in a great deal in contemporary issues such as environmentalism and the need to respect nature, tolerance for those who are different, acceptance, and the dangers of religious fundamentalism. Crash (2005), another contemporary film focusing on public issues, explores issues of racism and sexism.

2.4.4 How Film Influence Operates

The argument of whether media can influence behavior is one that has been constantly under debate most notably beginning with the Payne studies commissioned in 1929 and running to 1932 they studied the effects of motion pictures on children. These studies concluded that motion pictures indeed had a detrimental effect on children; in school performance, sleep habits, and delinquent behavior (Skylar 135-139). From this point forward, study after study has valiantly tried to prove or disprove the effects of media on children, most especially the effects of graphic violence. In most discussions concerning the effects of media the spotlight never moves very far from the violence debates. Yet, there are possibly more profound, far-reaching, and potentially dangerous effects than that of violence. Violence is something easily identified and widely discussed. The more dangerous

effects of media come from those areas that are not easily identifiable and are rarely the subject of debate or concern. It is the more subtle messages and undercurrents that are rarely seen or heard and thereby do not become the subject of open dialogue and debate that are the most dangerous.

Malcolm Gladwell, in a study on how people think and react in certain situations, describes a study where subjects viewed television news excerpts without sound, simply rating the facial expressions on each newscaster. Each of the three newscasters was discussing a current political race. At the end of the study, conclusions were drawn showing that favoritism towards a particular candidate was noted simply by looking at facial expressions without having any idea of what they were saying. Based on this and several other studies, Gladwell concluded, “This isn’t an obvious verbal message that we automatically dig in our heels against. It’s much more subtle and for that reason much more insidious, and that much harder to insulate ourselves against” (The Tipping Point 78). This is one way that film is able to exert influence, simply by not being obvious about certain issues.

In this section on how films operate in order to influence society, I will look at four areas, all closely linked and at times indistinguishable, yet all having some distinct characteristics; how hegemony is inscribed through film; the role of discursive transcoding (or how several discourses can overlap and work towards enculturation); how the unconscious is tapped into; and finally, how pleasure works to either distract from or enhance the message.

2.5 Hegemony

The role of hegemony works hand in hand with the concepts of discursive transcoding and the role of the unconscious, both concepts which will be discussed in more detail. The term “hegemony” was first originated by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci who basically argued that dominance by one group over another was not always strictly held by economic means, much as Marxist philosophy had previously believed, but instead, dominance was secured not only by the economic but also by the consent of the governed through a process whereby the ideology of the dominant class was made to seem natural, normal, or just plain commonsense to the group without power. Richard Dyer defines hegemony as, “the expression of the interests and world-views of a particular social group or class so expressed as to pass for the interest and world-view of the whole of society” (The Matter of Images 93). Without using the term ‘hegemony,’ Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner describe how film conventions work to make dominant ideology seem natural. They write:

The thematic conventions—heroic male adventure, romantic quest, female melodrama, redemptive violence, racial and criminal stereotyping, etc—promote ideology by linking the effect of reality to social values and institutions in such a way that they come to seem natural or self-evident attributes of an unchanging world. The conventions habituate the audience to accept the basic premises of the social order and to ignore their irrationality and injustice. (1)

The basic function of hegemony, then, is to allow the dominance of one group over another with the full consent of the group being dominated. The force behind this dominance is to make this dominance seem as if the dominant ideology is actually the ideology of everyone, and this is accomplished by making the ideology seem natural and normal. James Lull says that hegemony is “a method for gaining and maintaining power” (48). Lull goes on to comment on just how hegemony functions by writing, “Our customs and ‘just what we do in our family,’ particularly when we don’t reflect on what motivates such orientations or behavior or whose interests they ultimately serve are precisely how hegemony takes form in everyday life” (52). Part of being considered ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ is the fact of the pervasiveness of the dominant ideology. Henry A. Giroux writes that, “The prevailing ideology that dominates this country is so pervasive and powerful that it goes unquestioned [...]” (Breaking In To the Movies 20).

In order for the dominant ideology to become normal and naturalized, it must become unnoticed and unseen. Giroux continues by stating that, “dominant groups seize upon the dynamics of cultural power to secure their own interests while simultaneously attempting to make the political context and ideological sources of such power invisible” (Breaking In To the Movies 75). James Lull says that “Hegemony works on a grand scale, but in a subtle way. It is not a direct stimulation of thought or action. The most potent effect of mass media is how they inconspicuously influence their audience to perceive social roles and routine social

activities” (50). This power becomes ‘natural’, ‘normal’ by being invisible and by coming from many different discourses and saturating society from every conceivable angle. Malcolm Gladwell quotes a Harvard University professor of psychology as stating, “You don’t choose to make positive associations with the dominant group [...] but you are required to. All around you, that group is being paired with good things. You open the newspaper and you turn on the television and you can’t escape it” (Blink 85). Film is just another way that hegemony secures the dominant ideology. John C. Leydon says that “one of the major ways in which cultural hegemonies involving gender, race, or class are promoted and perpetuated is through the images of popular media, including film” (31). James Lull says that “Media legitimized certain ideas, making it more likely that those ideas will be accepted by the population” (53). Graeme Turner further explains that film has a unique ability to perpetuate hegemony because the dominant mode of film-making relies on realism. He writes:

Realist film creates a world which is as recognizable as possible; and audiences understand it by drawing analogies between the world of the film and their own world. They are assisted in this process by the lengths that realist film goes to in order to look like real life. [...] Realism’s disguising of the constructed as ‘the natural’ is a direct parallel to the function of ideology. The power of realist film,

however, lies in the efficiency of this disguise, its ability to appear to be an unmediated view of reality. (Film as Social Practice 156)

The key to the effectiveness of hegemony is constant reinforcement, especially reinforcement from many different areas of discourse. James Lull explains that:

the mass media dominate ideology is corroborated and strengthened by an interlocking system of information distributing agencies and taken for granted communication practices that permeate every corner of social and cultural reality. [...] This inter-articulating, mutually reinforcing process of ideological influences is the essence of hegemony. [...] Hegemony, therefore, depends on widespread circulation and social acceptance of the dominant ideology. (50)

The fact that hegemony can only exist with constant reinforcement from many different approaches leads directly into the concept of film and discursive transcoding.

2.6 Discursive Transcoding

The term ‘discursive transcoding’ was first used by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner in their description of the relationship between film and social history. “Films transcode the discourses (the forms, figures, and representations) of social life into cinematic narratives. Rather than reflect a reality external to the film medium, films execute a transfer from one discursive field to another” (12)

Expanding on this, Ray Pratt defines his understanding of discursive transcoding as, “the process whereby images in films and television are viewed as becoming part of the wider cultural system that ‘constructs’ social reality” (45). The key issue here is the argument that films actually become part of the construction of social reality. Douglas Kellner gives an example of how this works in describing the counter culture youth movement of the 1960s and the ensuing films about this movement. He writes, “These films transcoded (i.e. translated) representation, discourses, and myths of 1960s culture into specifically cinematic terms, as when *Easy Rider* (1969) transcodes the images, practices, and discourses of the 1960s counterculture into a cinematic text” (359). Discursive transcoding is the ability of the cinema to take in multiple societal discourses and translate these discourses into a cinematic statement. Discursive transcoding is, therefore, another method that allows hegemony to function through film.

2.7 The Role of the Unconscious

As mentioned previously in the discussion of how hegemony functions, the role of the unconscious cannot be overstated. Hegemony is primarily successful because of the unconscious acceptance of dominant ideology. Graeme Turner states emphatically that, “ideology is unconscious” (150). Chuck Kleinhans describes the relationship of ideology and unconscious, “Louis Althusser drew from Mao, Gramsci, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to posit a concept of ideology which stressed that people are socially positioned in power relationships and internalize this in their

unconscious [...]” (109). Films perform the same function of influencing through the unconscious. Henry A. Giroux writes, “Films do more than entertain, they offer up subject positions, mobilize desires, influence us unconsciously, and help to construct the landscape of American culture” (Breaking In To the Movies 3).

Conrad E. Ostwalt argues that “films are one of the most effective cultural vehicles for expressing beliefs and values , for they operate at once on the mythic and the ideological levels, both affecting consumers unconsciously and consciously promoting or reflecting a particular value system” (155). Specifically looking at the role of patriarchal hegemony, Laura Mulvey argues that “[...] the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (239). Malcolm Gladwell sums up the role of unconscious influence by writing:

We don’t deliberately choose our unconscious attitudes. [...] We may not even be aware of them. The giant computer that is our unconscious silently crunches all the data it can from the experiences we’ve had, the people we’ve met, the lessons we’ve learned, the books we’ve read, the movies we’ve seen, and so on, and it forms an opinion. (Blink 85).

Gladwell was not writing about hegemony, film studies, ideology, or discursive transcoding per se, but in what is described a “self-help” book, he sums up many of these ideas in layman’s terms.

2.8 Pleasure and film influence

Finally, one last avenue of discussion concerning how the ideological message of a film can influence society focuses on the role of pleasure found in film.

Henry A. Giroux comments that:

movies produce and incorporate ideologies that represent the outcome of struggles marked by the historical realities of power and the deep anxieties of the times; they also deploy power through the important role they play connecting the production of pleasure and meaning with the mechanisms and practices of powerful teaching machines.

(Breaking In To the Movies 3)

Jonathan Rosenbaum also acknowledges the relation of pleasure and influence, “that what is designed to make people feel good at the movies has a profound relation to how and what they think and feel about the world around them” (3). Both Giroux and Rosenbaum argue that it is through pleasure that influence is gained.

Laura Mulvey would take this argument one step further and argue that the pleasure found in watching a film must be destroyed in order to analyze and confront the messages of mainstream cinema. (240). Margaret R. Miles disagrees with Mulvey’s argument and writes, “Our task is neither to deny nor to destroy visual pleasure in order to do the sober work of analysis, but to trust our pleasure as a primary tool of interpretation. [...] Visual pleasure is the place to begin because by producing visual pleasure, a film communicates values” (11). However, Miles then

goes on to use Roland Barthes to support her argument, she first writes, “Roland Barthes once remarked that one “gets” the cultural message at the same moment one gets the pleasure.” (11) Yet, later in her argument she again invokes Barthes and expands on her earlier quotes by writing, “one ‘gets’ the cultural message at the same instant that one gets the pleasure; the cultural message is coated or masked by pleasure, so that the greater the pleasure, the less one notices and examines the cultural message” (22), which seems to slightly contradict her previous argument that the message comes in the moment of pleasure. However, according to her expanded explanation regarding Barthes, she admits that the pleasure may instead cover up or hide the message. And, once again the issue is the unconscious taking in the message, this time the message being masked or hidden by the finding of pleasure in the film. Perhaps it was the pleasure my children found in Cheaper By the Dozen (2003), that helped to mask the underlying patriarchal message. It was at that moment of the message that indeed, my pleasure stopped.

2.9 Film AS Religion

As ironic modern worshippers we congregate at the cinematic temple. We pay our votive offerings at the box office. We buy our ritual corn. We hush in reverent anticipation as the lights go down and the celluloid magic begins. Throughout the filmic narrative we identify with the hero. We vilify the antihero. We vicariously exult in the victories of the drama. And we are spiritually inspired by the moral of

the story, all while believing we are modern techno-secular people, devoid of religion. Yet the depth and intensity of our participation reveal a religious fervor that is not much different from that of religious zealots. (Hill, Geoffrey 3)

This quote, stated earlier in establishing film as modern day myth, seems equally appropriate in a discussion on how film acts as type of religion in modern society, and thus the need for repetition here. A close look at the above quote reveals the parallels between religious fervor and the cinematic experience. Another equally reflective quote comes from Conrad E. Ostwalt, Jr. as he writes of the film experience that it has, “challenged or begun to replace religious institutions in the scramble for societal attention and participation. [...] the movie theater has acted like some secular religion, complete with its sacred space and rituals that mediate an experience of otherness” (154). Ostwalt supports this argument with the following analogy:

Consider the following Saturday evening ritual. People file into a movie theater at a specified time, choose a seat, and, with others gathered with them, prepare for the experience of the cinema. There are rituals to be observed, behaviors that are deemed appropriate and expected, rules that govern the auditorium and the activities that occur there. Soon the moviegoers’ attention is transfixed to the giant screen as the senses are filed by sights, sounds, and sensations, which are

shared in part by the community of moviegoers in the auditorium. For an appointed time the crowd remains rooted and participates in the event of cinema, sometimes passively and sometimes with physical and emotional response. To the extent that this event allows us to transcend mundane life for a prescribed period of time, we are part of a sacred space, a sacred time, and, transfixed by the experience, we are confronted by an alternative reality, a “not me,” an otherness.

(155)

I have included this rather lengthy quotation because it so clearly elucidates the phenomenon of the movie-going experience and it so clearly supports the link between the film experience and the religious experience. Yet, the physical reality of sacred spaces and the ritualized experience of both cinema and religion, are but one aspect of the similarities that can be drawn. It should be acknowledged that more and more film watching comes in the form of rentals watched at home, thus limiting the ceremonial experience of the darkened theater and communal experience. However, the draw towards the theater remains strong, indicating that perhaps the ceremonial and communal aspects of the theater experience continue to contribute to the lure of the big screen.

Many of the functions that have historically been ascribed to religion, can now find corresponding practices within the cinematic experience. Conrad Ostwalt says that “forms of popular culture function in the same way traditional religion has

always functioned: to provide ways for one to make sense of one's world and life" (158). Margaret R. Miles concurs with this conclusion and writes, "[...] popular films can also be seen as implicitly, if not explicitly, addressing the question of how human beings should live" (7).

Many examples of how films might go about answering the question of how we should live include giving moral training and instruction. I. C. Jarvie writes of film narratives that, "by the use of imagination they can be applied to real-life problems, giving guidance on such matters as how to cope with the world, what is of true value, what sort of conduct is permissible" (x). If film-going has a power to influence and instruct, on par with religious power to influence and instruct; it becomes all the more imperative for audiences to critically analyze exactly what it is they are being taught when they go to the movies. "One can choose whether to accept, reject, or adopt in part a film's proposed values only when the question of how to live is consciously brought to watching and thinking about a film" (Miles 8).

By looking at what is going on behind the scenes, by identifying those values and ideologies that are being fed to us, we can view films more intelligently and with more awareness--and hopefully, choose for ourselves which values we want to uphold and not sit back and let the story-teller choose for us. It is not my assertion that all writers, directors, producers, or those involved in the motion picture industry have a pre-identified agenda, (though they sometimes clearly do), but that the simple act of choosing the story to tell and how to tell it, is, in itself, creating,

maintaining, reinforcing, or perhaps critiquing, some aspect of ideology. It is my intention to uncover and bring to conscious analysis what films have to say about the role of parents and how hegemony works to reinscribe and reinforce a patriarchal world view.

2.10 The Focus

I will be examining the roles of mothers and fathers by looking at several basic techniques used to reinforce patriarchy in films. The focus will be an examination of post-1990s Hollywood film with relevant background information coming from earlier Hollywood films. I will first look at films which ridicule fathers or father-figures who try to take on what is considered to be traditional female roles. These films seek to reinforce patriarchy by telling us that men are not supposed to take on feminine traits as this is not “natural,” therefore women need to continue to be the primary caregivers and allow men to focus on more “manly” pursuits. In these films it is necessary for a woman to come in and rescue the man by embracing and enacting the role she was intended for.

Another popular discourse uses comedy again in making fun of fathers who are taking on the role of care-giver, but in these films, the father or father figure, successfully navigates this traditionally female terrain. In this way, patriarchy is reinforced by illustrating that men can still be men and take on the traditional female roles as well. These men are able to annex qualities previously inscribed as female. Most of these films focus on the comedy aspect of the father becoming the good

mother. In a backlash against feminism, fathers and father-figures successfully navigate and take on the role of childcare. Paternity has been used as a means to perpetuate authority.

Next, I will look at a series of films that continue in the “Fathers Knows Best” tradition, showing that men can become better mothers, but in these films along with a commendation of the father comes a condemnation of the mother. These films focus not only on the father figure learning to parent, but additionally show the fault to lie with a mother who no longer places her sole priority on caregiving. The traditional family is validated. Another form of mothering film concerns a mother or mother-figure that does not have an instinctual knowledge of parenting simply because she is female. The mother figure must learn how to be a parent, much like the father figures have had to figure out parenting. The difference is that in many films (and cultures) women are naturalized as care-givers; thus, the depiction of females as not being naturally maternal takes on a different appeal.

The 1950s instilled in fathers the need to be the only breadwinners for the family, leaving the mother responsible for the care of the home and children. The 1990s began to slowly usher in an age of telling fathers that though they have been successful in all areas, it is time to slow down and prioritize. Now that we have been told that fathers can be every bit as good at parenting as mothers, it is time to tell that career oriented father that he is needed on the home front.

In other films, the father remains a strong caregiver, but in essence, “it takes a village” to raise a family successfully. Earlier films show a strong preference for the traditional family unit including the father as bread-winner and mother as care-giver, but later films show more equality in both care-taking and earning capabilities.

The initial spark for this research is found in Cheaper by the Dozen (2003) from which I then fanned out to identify other films and programs that contained patriarchal embedded ideologies about the traditional family. This is not to say that all films do this, in fact, there are many relevant examples of films and television programs which seek to resolve this tension by providing us with wonderful examples of professional and competent mothers and fathers. However, my concern was to identify varied and multiple examples of parenting found in film, look beyond the entertainment level, and bring into dialogue the mixed and multiple messages embedded within these films.

Hegemony seeks to allow dominant cultural values to be enforced without the knowledge of the oppressed. This function occurs in film through a system of discursive transcoding which suggests that constant exposure through media allows for the transference of social values. It is imperative to seek to understand how hegemony works through popular culture, such as film. With education comes power. My study seeks to educate filmgoers into learning how to identify the values and institutions that are being reinforced in order to unpack films and understand the underlying motives. The danger of hegemony comes in seeking to make acceptable

those values and institutions which serve the dominant ideology. It is my desire to reveal some of those values and institutions which are silently being upheld and reinforced through film.

Specifically, in my research and explication of particular films, I hope to illuminate underlying messages that continue to reinforce or perhaps in some ways, begin to question patriarchy. I believe these messages are not hidden deeply in covert messages, but easily understood once the right questions are asked and examined.

CHAPTER THREE

MOTHER SAVES THE DAY: IS IT CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN?

Tom and Kate Baker are just another typical suburban American family trying to survive the chaos of daily living. This family may be larger than most, having twelve children, but the frustrations and joys of raising children are only amplified in the Baker household. Life in America is good, the family has breakfast around the table, and the school bus duly arrives as the family dog escorts the last child out the door. Mom gives Dad a kiss on the cheek as he leaves for the day and she begins her routine of household chores. Once, this Mom even sat down during her few minutes of free time and wrote down her experiences with this rather large brood. Surprisingly, a publisher friend liked the writing and published the book and before you know it, Kate Baker is on her way to a career of her own. However, at the first sign that perhaps life would not be the same without Mom at home full time to handle everything from the making of peanut-butter sandwiches to the cleaning of the house, it becomes glaringly obvious that Kate Baker has only one choice after all, it is either the survival of her children and husband, or her career. There is no middle ground and Kate is more than happy to make the sacrifice for her children. It is very

obvious to Kate and those around her that a woman simply had to choose, one could not expect to have a career and a family and be successful at both.

Yet, we find another family with twelve children that deserve consideration. Here is the mother that proves to all those around her that she can do it all, and do it all well. This mother earned her Bachelor's degree in literature and was the first woman to speak at a University of California commencement. She went on to earn a master's degree in literature and finally earned her doctorate in psychology from Brown University, all while raising a family. Later, she would become the first woman member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, finally becoming a professor of management and engineering at Purdue University. ("Lillian Moller Gilbreth") And throughout her career her children and family survived, and not only merely survived, they thrived, as evidenced by the biographical account, Cheaper by the Dozen, written by two of her children, Ernestine Gilbreth Carey and Frank Gilbreth, Jr.

The ironic twist to the above stories is that Kate Baker was the media representation of motherhood in the year 2003, and Lillian Gilbreth, the story on which Kate Baker was modeled, represented the possibilities of motherhood in the year 1910. Lillian Moller Gilbreth, born in 1878, married and began raising her family in 1910. Looking at the life of Lillian Gilbreth, and her fictional representation as Kate Baker as seen in the 2003 Hollywood production of Cheaper by the Dozen, one must stop and wonder what had happened to mothers in America

that the testimony of a life such as Lillian Gilbreth's would be fictionalized to implant a message in total antithesis to everything Gilbreth exemplified. Lillian Gilbreth was a woman who proved that mothers could have it all; she was the living example of a career mother. Yet, nearly eighty years later, Hollywood was trying to prove once again, that Gilbreth's life was a bizarre fallacy, certainly not obtainable or worth striving for in our society.

In the 2003 version of Cheaper by the Dozen, patriarchal ideology reared its ugly head and reminded mothers that they belonged at home, devoting their lives to their husband and children and any aspirations beyond that life would only be detrimental to their children and family. It was backlash with a twist. The ideological goals were the same, to keep women in their place at home, though the tactics and methods had evolved. The methods must change to keep pace with experience, for as mothers began to find out the deception between each new charge, new charges had to be made to keep ahead of the game. For example, one well known fear that is frequently thrown at working mothers is the question of the potential negative effects of daycare. In simplistic terms, the daycare debate has raged for thirty years with attacks and counterattacks flaming the fires. Mothers have been told that daycare is a good thing, contributing to social development and leading to academic success in studies such as those done by Alison Clarke-Stewart in the 1980s. However, counterattacks to these charges appeared, claiming that children in daycare are more prone to behavior problems and aggressive personality

problems. (Gilbert) The debate rages back and forth between the two poles causing working mothers to continually be on the defensive about their choices.

Susan Faludi identifies these waves of charges as “backlash” which she defines as “an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women” (xviii). Faludi singles out specific periods in the history of the women’s movement where distinct gains were made and then identifies the ensuing backlash that occurred. Yet, for the backlash to be effective, it must constantly be changing and developing new strategies as the old strategies are disentangled and rendered useless. Faludi says of the changeability of backlash, “For the most part, its workings are encoded and internalized, diffuse and chameleonic. Not all of the manifestations of the backlash are of equal weight or significance either; some are mere ephemera, generated by a culture machine that is always scrounging for a “fresh” angle” (xxii). Backlash searches for a fresh excuse to cast the blame. Recurrent themes that mothers are beaten down with include the idea that children in daycare will be abused, only bad mothers leave children with strangers and miss all their growing up years, working mothers are the cause of divorce, and of course, working mothers shoulder the blame for the increased violence in society, including school shootings, drug abuse, and all other perceived forms of criminal activity. This charge was popular in the 1950s and continues still, according to Kathryn Keller who writes, “Opponents of women working believed not only that children suffered when mothers worked but that society suffered as

well. Delinquency and criminality resulted because children of working mothers were not raised properly” (16). One popular conception that is voiced all too frequently is that if mothers would just stay home and take care of their children, then all of the ills of society would suddenly disappear.

One method through which dominant patriarchal ideology seeks to pull mothers back into the home is through the portrayal of various problems that occur in society (and family) when mothers are absent. Two primary methods which have been employed by both popular films and television are to show all of the problems that occur when a mother is either completely absent (as in dead or permanently gone) or when a mother is temporarily gone from the home (as in working either part-time or full-time or in some other way distracted from full time care of her children). The second method is to show how completely inept fathers are at caring for children and making a mockery of all attempts a father may make to be a good parent. Both of these methods enforce the ideology that pushes the mother back into the role of full time caregiver as her “natural” and most necessary place in the family. Three distinct renderings of Cheaper by the Dozen, the original text of 1948, the film versions of 1950 and 2003, along with an analysis of popular television during these same time periods, will be used to examine the role of media in enforcing this dominant ideology.

3.1 Cheaper by the Dozen (1948)

The original text of Cheaper by the Dozen, published in 1948, was written by siblings Ernestine Gilbreth Carey and Frank Gilbreth, Jr. This best selling text is the story of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and their twelve children as they lived their rather extraordinary life in the 1920s. This is the story of a strong mother, Lillian Moller Gilbreth, a highly educated career woman and devoted mother of twelve children and her husband, Frank Gilbreth, not as highly educated but equally devoted as a father. In the text, Frank Gilbreth is shown to be a dedicated and highly competent father who is just as adept at running the household as his wife. These parents are the model of co-parenting, both taking equal responsibility and care of their rather large family while continuing with their own respective interests and research. This text weaves together three very important themes concerning parenting; 1) that mothers could successfully combine a career and motherhood, 2) that fathers could be competent caregivers, and 3) that the roles of mother and father could be fluid enabling a strong technique of co-parenting and allowing for both parents to pursue career goals while raising a family.

Lillian Gilbreth was clearly a woman dedicated to her career and her family, and she obviously saw no conflict between these two ideas. According to Jane F. Levey in her article, “Imagining the Family in Postwar Popular Culture: The Case of *The Egg and I* and *Cheaper by the Dozen*,” Lillian Gilbreth was described by her children “as a woman who maintained a flourishing and successful career as an

industrial psychologist alongside her bounteous childbearing and child-rearing responsibilities. [...] Neither her husband nor her children questioned her commitment to her career” (140). Gilbreth never seemed to concern herself or focus on the fact that she was clearly stepping outside of the patriarchal model; she was too busy doing what needed to be done, clearly fascinated by her work and her children. Levey goes on to note that “Cheaper by the Dozen presented a picture, however unattainable for most women, of a woman who successfully combined meaningful work with domestic responsibilities” (140). Gilbreth’s life was evidence that it was possible, even in 1920s America, for a woman to be committed to both career and family. Ann Hulbert says of Gilbreth’s independence, “Lillian Gilbreth was not tied down, physically or psychologically, by that I’m-not-indispensable-and-all-hell-will-break-loose-without-me mentality that is the trademark of contemporary supermomhood” (2). Gilbreth credited her husband, Frank, with equal capability to care for the children while she was away on business. In 1951, Gilbreth reflected on her life’s achievements and said the following:

I must say I feel rather sad that today’s children seem to get so much of the ‘either-or’ teaching. ‘A girl is either smart or pretty.’ ‘A man can be either a top-flight technical person or a top-flight human relations person.’ ‘A woman can be a success at marriage, or at a career.’ Such thinking seems to me basically wrong. Why not try to be both smart and pretty?

Adequate both technically and in human relations? A success at both marriage and a career? (Hulbert 3)

Clearly one of the reasons that Lillian Gilbreth was able to pursue her career with such a large family to care for was the fact that Frank Gilbreth considered himself to be as equally competent of a father as Lillian was a mother. This “larger-than-life paternal figure” combined his work with his family to such an extent that many times the boundaries were indiscernible (Levey 136). Unlike many fathers of his generation, Frank Gilbreth enjoyed his role as father and did not consider himself burdened by his paternal duties. Writing of their father, the authors of Cheaper by the Dozen say, “He had a way with children and knew how to keep them on their toes. He had a respect for them, too, and didn’t mind showing it” (3). Like Lillian, Frank was ahead of his time in his concerns for fathering. Levey notes that one of the reasons for the popularity of the book, when it was published in 1948, was the fact that the father played such a strong role in the family. Levey quotes historian Michael Kimmel as saying, “the vocation of fatherhood loomed larger and larger as the war ended, and it was often as fathers that men sought to anchor their identities as successes as men” (138). Levey then adds that “men’s wartime absences, together with women’s growing sense of their autonomy, prompted worries” (138).

The melding of these two powerful personalities of mother and father resulted in a complete state of co-parenting, a flexible condition of gender roles enacted within the family setting. Levey writes that:

the book's depiction of a working mother and domestically oriented father imparted fluidity to gender role definitions at a time when they were being questioned and redefined. [...] Cheaper by the Dozen blurred distinctions between work and family in such a way that it relayed a story about transformations in economic as well as family life. (137)

Both parents participated equally in child rearing and bread earning, a concept which in the late 1940s was comforting to both those mothers who had grown accustomed to running the household. This trend surely helped propel Cheaper by the Dozen to best-selling status, but it is equally important to note that though the story was published in 1948, the experiences related in the book actually occurred in the years 1910-1924.

By looking at the setting of the text, 1910-1920s, the popularity upon publication in 1948, and the following generation of social and family order, a dichotomy begins to appear. Judith Smith raises these questions in her article, "Reading the 1920s in the 1940s." Smith argues that this text is a clear example of the discontinuity in ideological change.

Levey's insightful close reading of two best-selling books from the second half of the 1940s reminds us that profound social changes set in motion during the Great Depression and World War II did not lead in a straightforward line to singular and predictable outcomes.

Gender historians are still trying to piece together what happened to “new woman” experimentation with work/family arrangements in the 1940s. (153)

Although Cheaper by the Dozen in its original form showcases the possibilities of equality within the home and indeed, highlights the validity of a woman’s ability to be successful at both career and mothering, these ideas seem to wither away as the strong male figure begins to dominate and control the family as evidenced by looking at film and television of the 1950s. William Graebner poses very serious questions regarding the sudden demise of this new family as modeled by the Gilbreths. “What prevented the imagined family of 1948 from becoming lived experience in 1955? In the largest sense, how and why do moments of possibility become moments of statis?” (157). Faludi offers one explanation of this apparent reversal as she describes the wartime economy of the 1940s. Millions of jobs were suddenly available to women who were seen as heroines and patriots for taking their place in the war effort. However, these women, for the most part, embraced their new financial freedom and had no intention of giving up these freedoms when the war was over. This was a time of great gains for women as “Women’s political energies revived; working-class women flooded unions, protested for equal pay, equal seniority rights, and day care; and feminists launched a new campaign for the ERA. [...] In a record outpouring of legislative goodwill, the ‘40s-era Congress passed thirty-three bills serving to advance women’s rights” (51). Yet, with the end

of the war and the return of servicemen, women were suddenly being corralled back into the home. Many forces combined to make this effort successful, government agencies shut down day care, extended benefits only to men, and allowed the displacement of working women by veterans. Industry fired many women immediately and laid them off in droves, as well as instituting caps on female salaries and prohibitions against hiring married women. The media collaborated as well as “advertisers reversed their wartime message—that women could work and enjoy a family life—and claimed now that women must choose, and choose only home” (52). Under the circumstances, it is understandable why a book such as Cheaper by the Dozen that proposes equal rights for working mothers should not only be eventually swept aside but reinstituted and reinvented with the goal of ultimately submerging the voice of the mother and replacing her with a more acceptable feminine model of maternal compliance to patriarchal dominance.

3.2 Media and the 1950s Family

During the 1950s the emphasis on keeping the mother at home continued to be highlighted using several different methods in both film and television. Patriarchal ideology supported the idea that women should be self-sacrificing and a career, if any, should certainly be subordinate to home life. Kathryn Keller conducted a study of mothers and work as represented in popular women’s magazines, looking also at the role of ideology during these same time periods. She writes, “It is expected that she should subordinate any outside interests, particularly a

career, to the interests of the family. The wife/mother is supposed to be self-sacrificing rather than to seek self-fulfillment” (3). The 1950s model family was presumed to include a stay at home mother who cared for the home and children and a bread earner father whose sole responsibility was to bring home the paycheck. This became the prototype for “normal” and all other family arrangements were seen as “abnormal” and unacceptable. Keller describes the “normal” family of the 1950s, “In the ‘normal’ American family, man’s role was well defined: He was the sole breadwinner, the head and final authority of the household. Woman’s role in the family was defined as the exclusive caretaker of the children; she was responsible for the management of the household” (13). Keller further identifies six arguments which were given to promote traditional gender roles in the family during the fifties:

- 1) Women’s work outside the home is a sign of maladjustment.
- 2) Work is against God’s plan for women.
- 3) Mother’s work is harmful to the child’s development.
- 4) Work is dangerous to society.
- 5) Women who work miss out on the full enjoyment of motherhood.
- 6) It is not economically sound for women to work. (14)

Keller supports her arguments by citing various magazine articles popular during the 1950s such as Ladies Home Journal and Good Housekeeping. Popular television shows from the era, such as Leave it to Beaver or Father Knows Best would also seem to support Keller’s assessment.

3.3 Cheaper by the Dozen (1950 film)

Looking at the first movie version (1950) of Cheaper by the Dozen, it is interesting to note the obvious change between the original text and the film version. For example, in the movie version, Lillian Gilbreth's first scene shows her coming down the stairs to greet her husband who is just home from a business trip, while she is holding an infant in one arm and the hand of a toddler with the other arm. This is in direct contrast to the reality of Lillian Gilbreth's life as well as the original text of Cheaper by the Dozen. In the text we find out as early as page three that Lillian is returning from a lecture engagement having left Frank at home to care for the family, thus identifying immediately in the text that Lillian Gilbreth was not only a mother but also a career woman who occasionally traveled for her business.

The image of Lillian that is given throughout the 1950 film version is that of devoted wife and mother, committed to the management of her home, in fact, she is never shown in any context other than that of mothering. Furthermore, even her agency as a mother is marginalized as the dominance of Frank Gilbreth as a powerful father figure supersedes Lillian's role as a parent. In looking at the life of Lillian Gilbreth we find that she was co-founder and full partner of the Gilbreth Engineering and Consulting firm, Gilbreth, Inc., and that she was equally involved in the day to day running and management of the firm. After Frank's death, Lillian took over sole management and continued running the company successfully for many years. The 1950s film version does mention at the end of the film after Frank's death that Lillian

was able to take over and continue Franks work, but the suggestion is that she merely took over where Frank left off and continued on as best she could without him. In fact, having been a full partner, Lillian clearly had the ability to continue the company. The 1950s film version of Cheaper by the Dozen was clearly modified to reflect the dominant ideological values by placing the mother back in the home on a full time basis.

Mother clearly took a back seat in parenting, conceding authority to her husband throughout the film. Frank was shown as a loving, but overly controlling father. The teenage girls rebelled against what is portrayed as rather extreme strictness on the part of Frank. The film shows Frank insisting that the girls follow the conservative norms of his generation and would not allow them any freedom whatsoever to fit in with their peers. For example, the Gilbreth children were required to wear “modest” bathing suits, in this case suits dating from the 1920s which covered the female body from shoulder to knee. This was obviously considered out of date as all the other teens and families shown on the beach were wearing more modern and less modest suits, much to the chagrin of the teenage Gilbreth daughters. Another old-fashioned stance that Frank took concerned his daughter’s hairstyles. He insisted that the girls wear their hair long even though one daughter in particular, Ernestine, desperately pleaded to be able to modernize her looks by cutting her hair. In the end, Ernestine defied her father’s authority and did cut her hair. One final example concerns Frank’s insistence on chaperoning his

daughter's dates. Frank insisted that he ride in the same car with his daughter as well as chaperone the dance in order for her to be allowed to attend. All of these examples showed Frank as the strong parent to a fault, while the mother merely stood back, sympathized with the girls, occasionally pleaded with Frank for leniency, but never stood up and took a strong stand against Frank. The film explicitly condoned Frank's sternness by showing how well respected he was, not only by his family, but by the community as well. Though Ernestine was mortified that her father insisted on coming to the school dance, she was delighted in the end to realize that her father had become a real hit with the other kids. The message in this film is that a strong father should stand up against the perils threatening the morality of their children by insisting, even when unpopular, that they follow a strict set of guidelines imposed by him.

3.4 Examples from Television

This ideology was also notably promoted on popular television programs as well. Three extremely popular programs which reflected family life during the 1950s are "Leave it to Beaver," "Father Knows Best," and "I Love Lucy." The first two shows, "Leave it to Beaver," and "Father Knows Best" are nearly identical representations of parenting and family life. Both of these shows portray a "normal" 1950s family, that being a stay at home mother who is devoted full time to the care of her children, husband, and home.

Though the family unit was the mainstay of the show “Leave it to Beaver,” the trials and tribulations of the youngest son, Theodore “Beaver” Cleaver, were the highlight of this show, which debuted in 1957. Once again, the “normal” 1950s family unit is featured as the central relationship unit. Mother, June Cleaver is pictured as feminine and submissive, frequently needing to rely on advice from her husband, Ward Cleaver, who is the epitome of the strong, wise, and in charge family man. During the course of the show the viewer learns a great deal about Ward Cleaver and his growing up years, but very little is ever known about June Cleaver. Once again, pointing out the centrality of the male figure and the marginality of the mother (“Leave it to Beaver”).

The central figure of “Father Knows Best,” which debuted in 1954, is naturally, the father. Both parents are portrayed as responsible, caring, and mature adults. However, there is no doubt who it is that “knows best” and who the head of the house is. Jim Anderson is pictured as the ultimate father of a truly idealized family. The father of this household was in control, wise, and able to dispense sensible advice to his family as they lived through the growing pains of the three children (“Father Knows Best”).

The “I Love Lucy” showed debuted in October of 1951, and was immediately a big hit amongst the viewing public. The example of “I Love Lucy” explicates a different type of family situation, especially during the most popular years which occurred before the birth of their first child. In these early episodes Lucy is depicted

as not performing her culturally assigned role in an appropriate manner, thus creating the comedy. Ricky, as the man of the house and father figure, must be the one who comes in and fixes everything for Lucy. In fact, the relationship between Lucy and Ricky can be seen as a father/child relationship. During the first six years of production, “I Love Lucy” was always among the top three television shows in popularity. The idea behind the show was that of a Cuban bandleader married to a slightly offbeat American woman of Scottish descent. The humor in each episode centers around the trials and tribulations of Lucy as she constantly pushes the limits of acceptable social gender role norms. Lucy was the embodiment of what was wrong when women tried to push the limits or failed to fulfill their predestined role in the family. And, as expected, Ricky was always there to reinforce the lessons that Lucy clearly needed to learn and protect her from herself and the outside world. Indeed, Ricky’s relationship to Lucy seems to us now as a father/daughter relationship as he instructed, disciplined, scolded, protected, and loved Lucy (“I Love Lucy”).

All of these examples represent, reinforce, and reflect the dominant ideology of the 1950s family. It was evident that in order to have a “normal” and therefore happy and healthy family life, it was imperative that mother stay at home full time focusing solely on her role as wife and mother. This is the role that worked as evidenced in the 1950s Cheaper by the Dozen, and in popular television programs such as “Father Knows Best,” and “Leave it to Beaver.” The opposite angle which is

found in “I Love Lucy” is what happens when a wife or mother figure tries to step out of the prescribed ideology. As in the case of Lucy, a strong male figure was required to bring her back into line and keep the family running smoothly.

3.5 Working Mothers and a Backlash

Kathryn Keller, tracking the progression of the working mother through popular magazines, offers a cultural synopsis of the decades following the 1950s celebration of the traditional family. In the 1960s, Keller explains that the women’s movement, heavily influenced by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, brought about a movement that found mothers questioning the necessity of staying at home as full time caregivers and many more women took on work outside the home. This newfound popularity of the working woman began to cause women who did choose to stay at home to feel as though they were under attack. In the early 1980s many mothers found themselves in the situation where working was no longer an elective choice, but a financial necessity in helping to provide for the family. This set up even more resentment between the mother who could afford to stay at home full time and did so by choice, and the mother who felt she did not have the opportunity or luxury to make such a choice.

Susan Faludi describes a backlash that began to occur during this same time. Some of the methodology the new ideology employed was to discredit the working mother by using the term “Super-Mom” and explaining why the working mother was not only short-changing her family, but also herself. No longer was the only impetus

one of illustrating the perils of a lack of mothering to children, now the perils included the mental and physical health of the woman herself. Faludi quotes a Newsweek article as saying, “Today, the myth of Super-Mom is fading fast—doomed by anger, guilt, and exhaustion. An increasing number of mothers are working at home and a growing number of mothers have reached the recognition that they can’t have it all” (90). E. Ann Kaplan finds this same approach being used in motion pictures to discredit the working mother. “The best mockery of the “Super-Mom” may be found in Baby Boom (1988), which also expresses the impossibility of combining career, sex-life and motherhood” (189). The connotation of “super mom” thus loses any positive appeal as reality sets in and confirms that the super mom syndrome short changes the family by providing a mother who is over-worked and unable to provide the same level of full time care-giving previously expected.

Another mechanism used to try to influence working mothers was to appeal to their own self-fulfillment which should be found in mothering. During the early 19th century through the 1950s, the emphasis was on self-sacrifice for the sake of the children, in the mid-1980s, this idea of self-sacrifice was substituted with self fulfillment. Kaplan describes this trend, “the main nineteenth-century motherhood discourse is that of suffering and self-sacrifice in the service of a duty of mother that goes unquestioned. The late-twentieth-century reification of mothering, now not as a duty (women no longer have to mother), but as in itself fulfilling” (194). The initial fears of long-term damage to the children of working mothers no longer survived as

these children grew up and became well adjusted and functioning adults, thus disproving the claim. It was therefore necessary to change the tactic from a focus on the children, to a focus on the mother.

A third prevalent tactic employed was that of discrediting fathers by portraying them as ineffective and unfit for parenting. Just as in Cheaper by the Dozen, the typical scenario is set in a comedic light showing a father figure who is usually intelligent and successful in the business world, yet when forced into what patriarchy would say is an abnormal role, comedy is the natural result. Laughter is at the expense of the father figure, who is obviously trying to fulfill what should be, according to societal norms, a female function. However, I would argue that there is a double meaning to this form of joke telling involving the role of fathers. Indeed, women are shown with more power in the relationships, they are the root of wisdom, mother knows best now, or does she? If you read between the lines you will see that the message clearly being delivered is that this system does not work well. The laughter is directed at these bumbling fathers, precisely because they are trying to accomplish something that they are not equipped to do. Robert Hanke explains comedy as “surprising, the improper, the unlikely, and the transgressive in order to make us laugh” (2). Society does not laugh at mothers who are nurturing; conversely, there is seldom laughter towards mothers who are not good at parenting. But there is laughter aimed at fathers who are not nurturing and who are not good at parenting. Society laughs at this father because he is being forced into a role that he

is supposedly not biologically programmed for and anytime someone tries to step outside the accepted roles of behavior, humor is often formed. The clear message then is that there would be less stress and families would function so much more smoothly if mothers would assume their natural biological role of mothering and nurturing and allow men to return to their naturally predestined roles of provider and protector.

3.6 Cheaper by the Dozen (2003 film)

It is nearly impossible to find similarities between Disney's Cheaper by the Dozen, released in 2003 and the earlier text or film version. The basic family unit of a mother, father and twelve children is about the only link between them. Surprisingly, the Gilbreth family gave this new version their approval. Film critic, Steven Averett, quotes Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, one of the two original authors of the book, as saying, "To anyone, and there'll be plenty, who says, 'Why isn't it based on the book?' all I can say is let them sit down with a pencil and paper and scratch their head and see what they would do if they were trying to do a contemporary film of that book. I think this is the only possible sensible answer" (37). Yet it is hard to believe that Lillian and Frank Gilbreth would agree with the latest interpretation of their family life and what they stood for. This film version turns the original story of the Gilbreth family on its head. No longer is the father figure competent and in control, no longer is the mother figure able to work and raise her family, and no longer are the children well behaved and supportive of their

family environment. The above mentioned ideological concepts are in full force in this film as the myth of the “Super-Mom” is exploded, the mother realizes that she cannot experience fulfillment by pursuing her own career, she must find her fulfillment in her children, and the father has now become the butt of every joke.

As the latest version of Cheaper by the Dozen opens, we see Kate Baker, full time homemaker and mother of twelve, in charge of a rather chaotic and disorganized household. Kate, however, has a dream. She wants to be a writer and before you know it, she has finished a story about her rather unusual family. A publisher offers to buy the book, but only if Kate will commit to a two week book tour to promote it. Kate accepts the offer with the support of her family and husband. Yet, she discovers two important things when she leaves. The first discovery is that she is lonely and misses her family, she doesn’t find much fulfillment in her book tour, she spends her time worrying about her children instead, thus the myth of finding fulfillment in one’s career is effectively exploded. The second discovery Kate makes is that it is not possible to be a “Super-Mom.” She finds out that her family is in total disarray without her full time presence in the home.

The strong presence of a competent father who co-parents is no longer a part of this Cheaper by the Dozen family. Tom Baker is a college football coach who is offered his dream job at his alma mater. Tom does try to help out with the children—he has the best of intentions—only this is obviously not his natural calling.

Tom is, after all, a football coach, an occupation obviously coded as ultra-masculine. Rob Blackwelder expresses his consternation at the idea of the incompetent father figure. “Is anybody else getting tired of doofus dad comedies?” (1) Blackwelder explains how the father figure has been increasingly ridiculed in television situation comedies as well as film. He invokes the following charge about Cheaper by the Dozen, “[...] most of “cheaper” consists of variations on the same cheap ineffectual-father jokes [...]” (2). Blackwelder understands that this is a cultural myth, and one that he wishes would simply stop being told, yet he fails to continue the line of argument and explain what the purpose of this myth might be. Blackwelder is simply angry that dads are getting what he thinks is a bad rap. He ends his argument by saying:

I grant the premise that many dads probably are just as oblivious as Martin’s caring but largely useless character. But with this movie I reached my tolerance level for perpetuating the myth. Even if the film were funnier, the underlying premise isn’t anymore. When even Steve Martin can’t find out- loud laughs in playing a dumb dad, dumb dads must be all played out. (3)

Though Blackwelder doesn’t seem to understand the reasoning behind the myth, he is certainly angry at this particular method.

3.7 Examples from Television

These same stereotypes of incompetent fathers are reinforced through television sit-coms on a regular basis. Two popular sit-coms that featured families are Everybody Loves Raymond and According to Jim. Both of these comedies include a father who is seen as floundering and helpless when it comes to helping with the home or children. Both of these shows also featured strong mothering figures, notably, both mothers are full time homemakers.

According to Jim takes fatherhood and pushes it back several decades. In this show, Jim (played by Jim Belushi of Saturday Night Live fame) is a beer drinking, crotch-scratching, belching construction worker and the father of three young children. Jim reinforces every negative stereotype of men and fathering that have been cultivated within society and reinforced on television. Jim is inept at every attempt of domestication. In one episode, his wife Cheryl, asks Jim to stop at the grocery store and pick up a few things on her list. He comes home with all the wrong items, specifically, one of the daughters had requested a “scrunchie” (which is a pony-tail holder) instead, Dad comes home with “munchies” for him, of course (“Slumber Party”). Every domestic conflict seems to end in a threat to his masculinity. In this same episode, Jim shouts, “What are scrunchies?” only to have the question answered by his single brother-in-law. Jim then confronts his brother-in-law with the question, “What are testicles?” alluding to the fact that if a man shows any signs of being domestic he is less masculine. Once again, television

portrayals of fathering reinforce the idea that men, as much as they may be willing, just are not able to be competent and nurturing fathers.

Everybody Loves Raymond placed the father figure in further peril as Raymond Barone is portrayed as a bumbling father who would prefer that his wife handle the household. Ray is seen as being inept in almost every domestic situation. In one episode, Debra (Ray's wife) is seen spending time balancing the checkbook and keeping the family books. Ray complains that it takes her too long to do this, so she challenges him to try it. The rest of the episode demonstrates how Ray cannot handle the checkbook for even a week. He forgets to write down checks and fails to balance the checkbook, landing the family heavily in debt and eventually having the electricity to their home turned off. Debra must come to the rescue and fix everything once again ("The Checkbook"). In this case, the father is seen as yet another child to be taken care of by the mother. It is solely the responsibility of the mother to keep the home from spinning completely out of control.

It is evident from looking at these forms of parenting as represented in the media that the agenda of the dominant patriarchal ideology continued to try to force the mother into the role of a full time homemaker. Margaret Marshment identifies the root cause of such ideology and writes:

It is, for the most part, men who are the photographers, publishers, editors, film directors, and so on, who produce the images that define women. And these definitions are ideological: in any situation where

a social group has the power to represent another group, it is likely that these representations will serve their own interests rather than those of the group represented. So, it may be argued, for instance, that it is in men's interests, as a group, for women to be confined to the domestic sphere; it reduces competition in the workplace and ensures a servicing for men at home to facilitate their work and leisure activities. (126)

It was unquestionably in the best interest of men to limit women as far as possible to the care of children, home and husband. This ideology was so strong and pervasive that Marshment continued her argument by illustrating how women were influenced by it. "Women may themselves be seduced into accepting such images, both because patriarchal ideology has achieved a general hegemony, and because, however much they work against women's interests in the long term, in the short term they may offer what benefits are available to women in a patriarchal society" (126). Lynda Haas agrees with the influence of ideology on women when describing films which position the female lead into that of a "good mother" or completely disregard motherhood by erasing them. She writes:

These are the familiar representations of the woman's identity as purely maternal; and although these parts cast mothers as residual, many women have been encoded to aspire to this identity. It is hard to calculate the extent of the damage of such sentimentalized versions

of mothers, for each woman identifies with her on-screen other to a differing degree, and each feel guilt (perhaps even unconsciously) for not being society's picture perfect mother in different ways. (197)

It is important to consider the impact of the subconscious on mothers and identity formation and the role that media plays in such formation. Haas writes that:

popular representations form the cultural imaginary—film and television reach far into our collective unconscious, setting the grounds for how we construct our identities, our politics, the personality of our culture and our location in it. Our vast exposure to these media is obviously important to cultural and personal identity politics. (195)

Not only does media representation send messages to mothers, it also acculturates children. In a study focusing on Disney films aimed at children, specifically looking at images of couples and families, Lisa Renee Tanner, Shelley A. Haddock et al. acknowledge the influence of such media on children.

How do children gain information about couples and families? First and foremost, they learn by observing and participating in their own families. However, families do not exist in vacuums, and familial interactions are clearly not children's only source of information about family relationships. Media are other sources from which

children gain information about their world, including couples and families. (355)

The influence of media is unavoidable. Armstrong Williams writes, “Every day, Americans are bombarded with thousands of plastic smoke-and-mirror images. These well-groomed visions float from our theaters and television. We swallow them whole. We absorb them into ‘self.’ They reflect and – passively—influence the world around us” (1). One major concern of such influence is gender roles. Daniel Chandler comments specifically on the role of television and gender role stereotypes, “Television still perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes because it reflects dominant social values. In reflecting them TV also reinforces them, presenting them as ‘natural’” (1). One final study looking at gender roles and media concludes, “[...] it comes as no surprise that the media also participate in dividing up the world in ways that both reflect and perpetuate stereotypes of gender” (Oliver, Sargent, and Weaver 1). It becomes rather conclusive that such representations in the media work to both reflect and reinforce gender role behaviors.

The impact of such media representations are far reaching and extremely damaging to women and mothers. This ideology becomes so firmly entrenched that it is accepted as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’, thereby unquestionable. As Marshment and Haas have pointed out, women and mothers become so thoroughly ingrained into these representations that they no longer consider any options other than what is considered by society as “normal.” This further endangers progress towards

equality. Additionally, Christine Woynshner writes, “The assumption that the care of children is the purview of women or that men are not caretakers hinders reform efforts in such areas as violence and poverty, as well as family issues like maternity/paternity leaves and adequate and affordable day care” (3). It is through these messages of what makes a “good” mother that dominant patriarchal ideology is reinforced. Susan Douglas, co-author of The Mommy Myth, which describes and debunks the new “Super-Mom” myth, argues that the current representations of motherhood need to be addressed. She writes, “I think motherhood is the unfinished business of the women’s movement” (1). No longer should mothers sit idly by and passively accept the role society deems to be appropriate. One of the defining statements of the women’s movement has been choice, the choice of women to pursue higher education, the choice of women to move into higher positions and higher paying jobs, and even the choice of women to be full time working mothers, or full time homemakers. What needs to be made clear to women is that there is a choice, a mother can certainly choose to stay at home and be a full time homemaker, or a mother can choose to be a part-time or full-time career person. The danger is in forcing a no-option choice on women and casting blame and guilt on mothers who choose to pursue a career. So why is a simple light-hearted comedy like Cheaper by the Dozen so dangerous? Because movies and television programs that continually try to prove that the family unit is doomed without the presence of a full time mother at home, present a worldview that is limiting and constrictive to

both mothers and fathers. The ideology that is favored in such a movie tells fathers they shouldn't even try to be nurturing and mothers that they should try nothing other than being nurturing. This is unfair to fathers as they would potentially miss out on valuable experiences with their children, it is unfair to mothers as it allows them no other option but to be the primary caregiver, and it is unfair to children as it casts them in the light of full dependency, needing only a mother to serve their every whim.

3.8 Examples from Film

The theme of the ridiculous father can be found in many types of films. The father or father-figure may be portrayed as simply obsessed with his career, as we see in the Santa Clause films. In the original The Santa Clause film (1994) Scott Calvin, played by Tim Allen, is a divorced father who is late picking up his son to spend Christmas Eve with him, late because he is attending the annual office Christmas party where he is promoting a new toy he has helped to develop for his company. Wanting to be the good father, Scott decides to cook a traditional Christmas dinner. During the kitchen escapades, Scott catches the turkey on fire and completely destroys any semblance of a meal; instead, he ends up driving around town with his young son, Charlie, looking for somewhere to get a meal. They end up at a 24 hour diner along with other single fathers and those who could find no where else to be. Further complicating Scott's hopes to have a nice dinner with his son, the diner is out of many of the foods that Charlie and Scott were hoping to have for their

Christmas dinner and they have to settle for whatever is left over at the diner. The plot is further developed by the revelation that Charlie's mother, Laura, and her new husband Dr. Neil Miller, have told Charlie that Santa Claus does not really exist, angering Scott who wants Charlie to continue to have a childhood belief in Santa Claus. This complication further sets up the dichotomy between what we are expected to believe is the mature, rational, and scientific (Dr. Miller as a psychiatrist) and the irresponsible, immature and fun-loving nature of Scott. The mature and more natural parent as mother versus the immature and unnatural parenting of father helps to promote the idea that Laura is the obvious choice of good parent for Charlie. Further developing Laura as the natural parent is the fact that she is pregnant, clearly the model of maternal instinct and ability. Throughout the film, Scott is learning what it means to take responsibility for someone else and how to show true love to his son. Through this revelation Scott realizes that Charlie is better off living with Laura and Neil. Scott becomes a better parent, and in doing so, makes the more mature and responsible decision of agreeing that Charlie should live with his mother.

Another type of ridiculous father movie portrays the father-figure as someone who just doesn't know what to do with or around children. A good example of this are the Are We There Yet? movies starring Ice Cube as Nick Persons who wants to portray the image of a good potential-father. In the first film, Are We There Yet? (2005) Nick volunteers to drive two children, thirteen year old Lindsey and seven year old Kevin, up to visit their mother who is forced to work out of town over the

New Year's holiday. Nick does this in order to try to further his romance with Suzanne, the divorced mother of the two children. The children, however, want to discourage any relationship between Nick and their mother, so they do their best to make the trip a total nightmare for Nick, thus giving rise to many humorous situations along the road.

The second movie in this series, Are We Done Yet? (2007) continues this same pattern of the buffoon father-figure. In this film, Nick and Suzanne have married, and Suzanne is now pregnant. In forming this new family, Nick and Suzanne move from the city to the suburbs to begin their new life together. The humor is derived from the renovation of an old house as Nick again proves himself to be inept and the butt of many jokes. Suzanne has to be the real "parent" of the film in maintaining maturity and responsibility in the midst of the total chaos and absurdity perpetuated by Nick.

In both of these films, the father figure is shown as out of his element and therefore the source of the comedy. Once again, patriarchy reinforces the concept that nurturing and parenting are natural to women as we see that all the women in these films are the better parent, and in fact, in the case of The Santa Clause and Are We Done Yet? The mothers are both pregnant, reinforcing the concept of maternity. In all of these cases sympathy is created for the father figure as he tries his absolute best to be a primary caretaker and fails miserably, once again establishing that

fathers, though they have the best intentions, cannot be primary caretakers as it just isn't natural for them to do so.

CHAPTER FOUR

FATHER KNOWS BEST

The next type of film that falls under the rubric of parenting films, centers again on a man trying desperately to be a good father, but in this cycle of film, the father is successful at becoming a primary care-taker. Instead of relying on the mother to come in and fix things or take over, such as was the case in the aforementioned style of comedy in films like Cheaper By the Dozen and The Santa Clause, this time the mother is, for one reason or another, not available, and the father is forced to take over. Most of these films are comedies revolving around the transformation of the father; however, even the most intense drama includes comedic effects as the father tries to change his underlying nature to be a parent. For example, in the dramatic film, Kramer vs. Kramer (1979), there are several scenes involving Ted Kramer not being able to handle normal domestic chores such as carrying groceries in a grocery store where he is shown continually dropping everything as he tries to carry too much and juggles the groceries on his way to check out. The idea of the father trying to be domesticated is still portrayed as comedic. Beyond the comedy, however, the other feature these films have in

common is that of showing that fathers can eventually do the job of mothering even better than mothers can.

I will argue that there are four basic underlying issues surrounding this “father knows best” ideology: 1) fathers can make better parents than mothers, which allows for 2) men to show emotions and exhibit gentleness and kindness, which requires 3) a reinforcement of patriarchy; the previous three points resulting in 4) a response to and attack on feminism. The first three of these issues tend to follow a linear progression as portrayed on film. The 1970s and 80s show that men can become competent mothers; the 1990s illustrate these same men who can also show more emotion and expose a softer feminine side; the 21st century brings a shift towards patriarchy as a strong father figure replaces the mother simply because he is convinced that he can do a better job of parenting.

The late 1970s and throughout the 1980s marks the beginning of films which show fathers taking over as primary caretakers of the family (Kramer Vs. Kramer 1979, Mr. Mom 1983), the first as drama, the second as comedy. In the 1990s we see the “kinder, gentler” male coming into the forefront. This consisted of men who were initially seen as ultra-macho (Kindergarten Cop 1990), irresponsible and immature (Mrs. Doubtfire 1993, Big Daddy 1999), or simply a consummate bachelor (A Simple Twist of Fate 1994). All of these men eventually become loving father-figures who are able to express emotion. Moving into the 21st century, the response seems to be a return to patriarchy as more films are produced which show a very

strong father figure who takes over by replacing the mother because he thinks he can do a better job (Pursuit of Happyness 2006, Daddy's Little Girls 2007), or simply because it is part of his job (The Pacifier 2005). In these films the emphasis is definitely on the macho male figure, though emotion is present in the father, there is a switch in balance which puts priority on the strong patriarchal father versus the loving, gentle father.

Lucy Fisher recognizes the progressive tendency in film that moves from drama to comedy to the incompetent mother:

the specter of male motherhood first appeared in contemporary melodrama before propagating in the comic realm: Kramer vs. Kramer, Ordinary People (1980), and Table for Five (1983) were notorious cases in point. Subsequently, a slew of comedies were spawned in which men supplant the female parent—a virtual ‘baby boom.’ In the American cinema, one thinks of Mr. Mom (1983), Three Men and a Baby (1987) [...] Eventually, in a film like Baby Boom (1987), woman herself comes to be configured as the incompetent mom—as though to reclaim her maternal/cinematic role, she must now mimic a genre determined by men. (121)

The films focusing on drama were rather quickly replaced by films focusing on the comedic. “The ‘sensitive man’ drama was a brief cycle, and as the 1980s progressed, Hollywood stories of men getting in touch with their feminine sides were

more likely to be presented as outright comedies” (Benshoff 276). As previously argued, comedy is the perfect vehicle for showing men trying to perform in a role that isn’t considered “natural” for them. “They reinforce traditional gender roles by asking audiences to laugh at the idea of men ‘acting’ like women” (Benshoff 276). However, by eventually overcoming this difference, patriarchy is reinforced as men show they can become better mothers than mothers. Lucy Fisher, in referring to Kramer vs. Kramer writes, “[...] it begins with a woman’s abandoning her child and domestic duties, leaving them to a reluctant man. As the film progresses, however, the man rises to the occasion and is deemed superior to the woman at the job she has vacated” (123). Susan Jeffords sees this phenomena as a “wholesale social patterning, in which these men become not only the replacements for women whose work has interfered with their ability to mother their children [...] but fathers for an entire human future” (255). In the 1980s, we see the beginning of this pattern which is initially integrated by instilling the new ideology which says that fathers can take over the role of mothers.

4.1 The 70s and 80s: Fathers as Mothers

4.1.1 Kramer vs. Kramer

Kramer Vs. Kramer (1979) (from now on referred to as Kramer) is frequently cited as the beginning of the contemporary film cycle featuring a father who has to learn to become the primary care-giver to his children. It is also cited as one of the few films which use drama instead of comedy. Though there are moments of

comedy, overall the film is deeply dramatic, poignant and melancholy. Most academic critics see Kramer as primarily being a story that pits mothers against fathers while celebrating patriarchy and deriding feminism. However, a closer analysis might reveal why more popular culture critics see Kramer as giving a more balanced portrayal of parenting and individual needs. Beyond these arguments, Kramer also begins the cycle of characterizing the father as having the ability to be nurturing and caring.

“Feminism is put in its place in Kramer vs. Kramer, a film that demonstrates that father does indeed know best (even about mothering)” (Ryan and Kellner 11). A scene in the film validates this reading in a very concrete way. As Ted Kramer goes into work and tells his boss about his wife leaving him, he makes a comment to his boss that his wife has been listening to a neighbor about that “women’s lib” stuff, the camera then shifts to O’Connor, Kramer’s boss, as he gets a knowing smirk on his face as if to say, “AHA! Women’s Lib! That’s the problem!” Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin cite Kramer as one of the films that, “celebrate the new man by demonizing the new woman” (276). Elizabeth G. Traube says that, “Most 1980s movies construct good, nurturing fathers as substitutes for bad, overambitious mothers, and such constructions have strong antifeminist implications” (25). Indeed, Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner in a close reading of Kramer, explicate how even the filming techniques used in Kramer are used to place Ted Kramer in a dominant position over his wife, Joanna. “Throughout the film, camera rhetoric, image

composition, and framing all work to position Ted as a superior being and to situate Joanna as a silent, cold, and neurotic presence who ultimately seems inferior and undeserving of the child” (158). They go on to paraphrase an argument by Rebecca Baum in which they say:

He (Ted Kramer) is usually situated high up in buildings, and he appears in the frame as an active, moving figure. Joanna, on the other hand, is often positioned at the bottom of buildings, hiding behind windows. Her presence is usually cool and distant; she is a motionless observer rather than an active agent in the frame. (159)¹

Eileen Malloy also notes the camera angles as she writes, “An upper, male-dominated domain is created when the camera pans up the sides of skyscrapers. The action takes place on the very top floors of these phallic monsters. [...] All but two of Streep’s scenes take place on the ground floors of buildings or outdoors on the ground” (9). The last scene that Malloy uses to justify her argument concerning camera angles pertains to the courtroom scene and is worth quoting at length:

The other time Streep is shown on an upper floor is in the courtroom. The opening shot of this sequence angles down on Streep as she enters an arched doorway. She clutches herself with her arms held tightly in front of her. Then we look up at Hoffman—way up. He’s

¹ The spelling of Rebecca Baum has been corrected from Rebecca Balin as referred to by Ryan and Kellner.

perched at the top of three flights of stairs. The angle of this shot is so severe that he looks in danger of falling through the front plane of the composition. The juxtaposition of these two shots establishes Streep's moral and emotional smallness in contrast to Hoffman's moral righteousness and emotional vulnerability. (10)

The character of Ted Kramer is consistently reinforced as being dominant over that of his wife.

Finally, Eileen Malloy in her analysis of Kramer writes that, "Kramer vs. Kramer is Hollywood's answer to contemporary questions of male parenting, the erosion of the family, and the women's movement" (1). Benshoff and Griffin see the dichotomy set up between mothers and fathers, "In a number of films, images of loving, nurturing fathers are contrasted with prejudicial images of selfish mothers" (157). In the movie, this is exemplified by Ted Kramer's reaction to his wife Joanna as she is trying to make him hear that she is telling him she is leaving. All he wants to do is trivialize her words and instead turns the conversation into one where he is simply justifying his arrival late from work and his need to provide for the family. Ted says to Joanna, "I'm sorry I was late but I was busy making a living" (Kramer screenplay). In this way Ted is reinforcing patriarchy by reminding Joanna that he is fulfilling his expected responsibilities and she should do the same. One final example of the way that Kramer pits mothers against fathers and derides feminism is Ted Kramer's outburst towards his neighbor, Margaret Phelps. Ted believes Margaret is

a feminist and has encouraged Joanna to leave. Margaret tells Ted that she feels it has taken a lot of courage for Joanna to actually leave and set out on her own. Ted replies that, “I’d like to know what the hell kind of courage it takes to walk out on your husband and child” (Kramer screenplay). In this way, Ted is making the accusation towards Joanna, and yet aimed at all feminists, that any woman who finds it necessary to leave her family in order to find herself is not really a courageous person, but a coward. Patriarchy is being threatened when the wife and mother forsakes her socially assigned duty and walks out.

Though it is dangerous to overlook the previous arguments, there are some other angles that have been brought out by popular cultural film critic Roger Ebert. Ebert argues that Kramer brings out the needs of both characters and resists a clear cut fault-finding resolution. Ebert contends that this is a movie that doesn’t choose sides.

Kramer vs. Kramer wouldn’t be half as good as it is—half as intriguing and absorbing—if the movie had taken sides. The movie’s about a situation rich in opportunities for choosing up sides: a divorce and a fight for the custody of a child. But what matters in a story like this (in the movies and in real life, too) isn’t who’s right or wrong, but if the people involved are able to behave according to their own better nature. (1)

Ebert does point out particular places in the movie where we might be tempted to choose sides. The first such scene is, naturally, when Joanna actually leaves the family and the inclination might be to accuse Joanna of destroying the family. Yet, Ebert argues that we've already been told at least part of why Joanna is leaving and have witnessed first-hand how Ted ignores her and trivializes her concerns. This mitigates our fault finding. Again, during the courtroom scene, Ebert explains that there is "no inclination at all to choose sides," though we may sympathize with Ted, at this point we are simply watching this drama unfold. (2) "The movie has encouraged us to realize that these people are deep enough and complex enough, as all people are, that we can't assign moral labels to them" (2).

The positive potential of a being a good father should not be overlooked either. There are several indictments of Ted Kramer as a father in the beginning of the film, as it is clear that he doesn't know anything about his son or the workings of the household. In fact, he doesn't even know what grade in school his son is in. Yet, the good father model is constructed through Ted's ability to learn and his desire to become the best parent he can be. After losing custody of Billy, Ted's lawyer tells him they could appeal but it would require that Billy take the witness stand and testify. Knowing how much this would hurt Billy, Ted declines to proceed further with custody. He agrees to allow the court decision to stand, even though he will be, in essence, losing his son. This is the test of the true parent, much like the Biblical parable of King Solomon and the two mothers in which King Solomon orders that

the baby be cut in two and half given to each mother, knowing that the true mother will be the one who is willing to sacrifice her son so that his life would be spared.

(I Kings 3:16-28) The true parent's natural desire will be to sacrifice themselves to protect the child. This is what Ted Kramer does in the end. But, then again, this is also what Joanna does in the end when she makes the decision to not enforce the court order and allow Billy to stay with Ted.

Kellner and Ryan note that films, among them Kramer, "present new images of loving, nurturing fathers, focus on the impact on children of divorce, and idealize relations between fathers and children" (157). Indeed, Ted Kramer in his desire to be a good parent eventually loses the job he has worked so hard to get. This leads to Ted having to search for another job and eventually accepting a much lower paying and far less prestigious job. However, while the role of the father as good parent is all well and good, the undercurrent of patriarchy continues to be reinforced. "Patriarchy in this film is saying that it can reform, but it is doing so in a way that leaves intact the structuring assumptions of a patriarchal social system. It is saying that a man can both mother and work successfully. The question it poses implicitly is, 'why can't a woman do the same?'" (Ryan 159). In the end, this question is the center of a double-edged sword for women. Historically, patriarchal ideology has told mothers that they must choose, they could not work outside the home and raise a healthy, happy family, look what happened to Kate Baker in Cheaper by the Dozen when she left a man in charge. In Kramer, Joanna has to leave her family behind in

order to go out into the world. When a woman does try to both mother and work, she is required to balance and in the end, patriarchy insists that she must choose. Yet, like Ted Kramer, a man is not asked to choose between work and family, instead he is celebrated as the better mom.

4.1.2 Mr. Mom

Tagline from film: When mom goes to work, dad goes berserk.

As mentioned previously, the dramatic aspect of fathers parenting quickly shifted to comedy. Four years after the huge success of Kramer, Mr. Mom appeared on the scene, the title telling the whole story. Differing from Kramer, the mother in Mr. Mom does not leave the family unit to pursue a separate life. In Mr. Mom, Caroline Butler, played by Teri Garr, goes back to work after her husband, Jack Butler, played by Michael Keaton, gets laid off from his engineering job at a car manufacturer in Detroit. Jack and Caroline make a bet to see who can get a job offer first and Caroline wins by securing a job at an advertising agency, forcing Jack to take on the role of full time stay at home dad. In essence, Caroline is doing her part to support the family because Jack can no longer do so. It is clearly the function of comedy in this film to illustrate just how un-natural parenting and running a household is for a man. Jack is a college-educated engineer, and yet he is, much like Tom Baker in Cheaper by the Dozen, dumber than dumb when it comes to everyday life. The grocery scene in Kramer is repeated in Mr. Mom, this time with more time devoted to the shopping trip in order to fully explore all the comedic possibilities.

For some reason, Jack cannot make it down the grocery aisles without knocking over row after row of canned goods. Every domestic duty suddenly becomes an extreme challenge eventually turning into a full fledged fiasco. Jack, though on the outside seeming to be a normal, mature adult male, cannot figure out how to do laundry, change a baby's diaper, or vacuum the rug without each event resulting in total bedlam. Obviously, the natural nurturing assigned to females also extends to these rather simple and mundane household chores, as Jack is completely and totally out of his element at home. Previous scenes of Jack at work show him to be a competent and intelligent man, yet for some reason, when he stays home he loses any semblance of rational thinking abilities.

On the flip side, Caroline seems to be a natural for her new job. As a homemaker, she has a highly-developed sense of consumer needs and is able to design an advertising campaign which lands her agency a huge account. Although successful in her new job, Caroline misses her life as a full-time stay at home mother. Several poignant scenes of her missing dinner with her family, or having to leave on Halloween night for a business trip while her family watches her drive away, reinforce the idea that if a woman tries to have a job, she will be missing out on her family.

At this point Cheaper by the Dozen and Mr. Mom seem to have many similarities. The mother in both of these films is mature, responsible, and a wonderful mother and homemaker. Both mothers take on a job and both have the

ability to be successful in their career. The fathers in both of these films are both college-educated intelligent men, but both of them are also completely inept at anything domestic. This is where the difference between these films comes in. In Cheaper by the Dozen, Mom has to come home and take care of things as Dad is never going to be able to figure it out and make things alright. In Mr. Mom, Dad does figure it out, with the tune of Rocky playing in the background, Jack becomes domesticated. The new Jack can clean house, take care of the kids, do the shopping, cook a gourmet meal and set a candlelit table for a romantic dinner. On top of that, he is able to do what Mom was not able to; he is able to get their young son Kenny to give up his security blanket by reasoning with him “man to man.” Dad has evolved into a better Mom. But, now that it has been proven that men can do it all and do it better, the natural order must still be restored if at all possible. Caroline ends up punching her boss in the nose after fending off his sexual advances and goes home assuming she has lost her job. Soon thereafter, her boss comes to her home begging her to come back to work at the same time that Jack’s boss also comes begging Jack to return to his old job. Naturally, Jack resumes his appropriate role and takes over as the primary bread-winner for his family. Caroline emphatically tells her boss that she no longer wants to work for him as she stands inside the doorway of her home next to her husband. There is no longer any need to discuss who will stay home and take care of the children. Jack has declared his intention to go back to work and

Caroline will now be the one to stay home and assume her natural role of caring for the children and home.

Mr. Mom embodies both types of story plots that Robin Wood defines as plots which embodies the “restoration of the father” resulting from a “decade of feminism and liberation” (213). “There is the plot about the liberated woman who proves she is as good as the man but then discovers that this doesn’t make her happy and that what she really wanted all the time was to serve him” (213). Caroline indeed proves that she is able to make a living as well as Jack. Her discovery of her unhappiness comes in finding out that to be successful in the workplace she has to fend off sexual predators like her boss and she is pulled away from her children and family at the same time. The second plot that Wood identifies is, “the plot that suggests that men, if need arises, can fill the woman’s role just as well if not better” (214). Mr. Mom fits Woods definition of a restoration of the father story in both ways, the father becomes the better mother, and the mother discovers that what she really wanted all along was to serve.

4.2. A Gentler, Kinder Father: The New Sensitive Man

The second way that the father-knows-best mentality is bolstered is through the depiction of the kinder, gentler new man that emerged in the 1990s. Susan Jeffords has written extensively in the area of the new man of the 1990s as well as masculinity in film. She explains that:

In the 1990s, externality and spectacle have begun to give way to a presumably more internalized masculine dimension. [...] More film time is devoted to explorations of their ethical dilemmas, emotional traumas, and psychological goals, and less to their skill with weapons, their athletic abilities, or their gutsy showdowns of opponents. [...] What Hollywood culture is offering, in place of the bold spectacle of male muscularity and/as violence, is a self-effacing man, one who now, instead of learning to fight, learns to love. ("Can Masculinity be Terminated?" 245)

Though the image of a more sensitive male may on the surface seem to be positive, Donna Haraway considers it somewhat troubling as she notes in an interview with Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, "But the image of the sensitive man calls up, for me, the male person who, while enjoying the position of unbelievable privilege, also has the privilege of gentleness. If it's only added privilege, then it's a version of male feminism of which I am very suspicious" (19). The 'new man' of the 1990s was annexing previously ascribed feminine traits in order to reinforce another form of patriarchy. Jeffords goes on to explain that this new, sensitive man of the 1990s was being portrayed in films as a father as a way to allow men to show emotion. "[...] fathering became the vehicle for portraying masculine emotions, ethics and commitments" (254). Jeffords cites 1991 as the year of the transformation. She explains:

1991 was the year of the transformed U.S. man. There's hardly a mainstream Hollywood film from that year with a significant male role that does not in some ways reinforce an image that the hard-fighting weapon-wielding, independent, muscular, and heroic men of the eighties [...] have disappeared and are being replaced by the more sensitive, loving, nurturing, protective family men of the nineties. ("The Big Switch" 197)

4.2.1 Kindergarten Cop

Jeffords considers Kindergarten Cop starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as the key transition film, produced in 1990, which serves as the channel between the macho man of the 1980s and the new man of the 1990s. This transitional film not only predicates the kinder, sensitive man to come in movies of the 1990s, but it is also in itself a model of the transition from macho 1980s man to sensitive 1990s man, all embodied in the character of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the most macho hard-bodied character of the 1980s. Jeffords offers up Schwarzenegger's character as the "cultural key to the refiguring of U.S. manhood in the nineties" ("The Big Switch" 199). In Kindergarten Cop, Arnold plays the character John Kimball, a tough as nails police detective who is on a case to convict notorious drug dealer Cullen Crisp. Kimball is described as a "tough, unshaved, brutal, determined police officer" ("The Big Switch" 199). Kimball resorts to the typical 1980s bad guy tactics as he chases after the key witness in order to convince her to testify. Here we have the typical

chase scenes of doors being broken through and guns blazing. John Kimball is the incarnation of the 1980s macho man action adventure hero. Kimball, continuing on his quest to convict Crisp, goes undercover to Astoria, Oregon where he is searching for Crisp's ex-wife and son in the hopes of offering her a deal to testify. But this is where the story begins to take a slight detour from the usual action adventure fare. The undercover operation goes slightly awry when Kimball's female partner takes ill and is not able to assume her role as the kindergarten teacher and Kimball is forced to take over and finds himself suddenly facing a room full of kindergarteners. At this point the comedy aspects surface as we see the macho undomesticated man trying to deal with a class of innocent five year old children. Kimball eventually gains the admiration of his class, and becomes emotionally involved with another teacher, who turns out to be Crisp's ex-wife, the person he had been searching for all along. Through a series of chase scenes and close encounters, in the end Crisp is killed by Kimball and then Kimball has to be rescued by his female partner. Yet, Kimball has emerged as a new man, learning how to love along the way. Perhaps the biggest revelation is that Kimball chooses to leave police work and embrace his new life as a kindergarten teacher. Jeffords identifies several messages for masculinity in the 1990s. "One of the clearest messages to come out of Kindergarten Cop is that the tough, hard-driving, violent, and individualistic man of the eighties is not like that by choice" ("The Big Switch" 200). In the case of John Kimball, we find out that he once had a wife and son who left him and in order to survive the

pain, he buried it deep within and threw himself into his work, not allowing himself to feel. He did not choose to be the ultra-macho violent and brutal police detective and once he was able to break past his emotional handicap, he was able to reconnect with his emotions and become the new man that he wanted to be.

The other message that John Kimball is able to deliver is the importance of family. Jeffords asks the question, “What happened to turn that relentless, law-making, brutalizing cop into a nurturing, playful and loving kindergarten teacher?” (“The Big Switch” 199). Her answer is family. It is because of losing his first family that he becomes embittered, lonely, and unhappy. But, through the opportunity to regain a family, Kimball is able to learn to love again. The final message according to Jeffords is that, “The emotionally whole and physically healed man of the eighties wants nothing more than to be a father, not a warrior/cop, after all” (“The Big Switch” 200) In the case of John Kimball, he no longer is parent to his own biological son, but instead is given the opportunity to parent again with a new family. In many of these films it is not the true biological father that takes on the parenting role, but instead a father surrogate, such as can be seen in two other 1990s films featuring a single man who is thrust in parenthood, A Simple Twist of Fate (a lesser known 1994 Steve Martin venue,) and Big Daddy, 1999.

4.2.2 A Simple Twist of Fate

A Simple Twist of Fate, written, co-produced and starring Steve Martin, is a latecomer father drama film, though like Kramer, it does have its moments of

comedy. More importantly, A Simple Twist of Fate is a perfect vehicle for highlighting male emotions. Based loosely on the novel Silas Marner by George Eliot, A Simple Twist of Fate is the story of a miserly recluse named Michael McCann. The story begins with McCann being an expectant father anxiously awaiting news from his wife concerning her latest doctor's appointment. Quickly, McCann is thrust into a downward spiral as he finds out that he is not the father of the child his wife is carrying. Reeling in despair, McCann retreats alone to a country cottage where he spends his time collecting gold coins and building furniture. McCann is clearly despondent after the loss of his soon to be family and is unable to find comfort in his work or his treasure, the gold coins. McCann is soon the victim of a robbery and all his coins are stolen. Not long after this, a toddler wanders into McCann's home after her drug addicted mother dies in the midst of a blizzard in the road just outside McCann's home. McCann takes in the little girl, eventually deciding to adopt her, seeing her as being sent to him to replace the child and family he lost. To add yet another twist of emotion, when the child, Mathilda, turns twelve, her biological father steps forward and sues for custody. Mathilda does eventually end up with McCann after a last minute secret is revealed to the court in a gut wrenching and tear-jerking melodramatic finale. This film is the perfect conveyance for male emotion and it wrings it for all it can. Having a nineteenth century British melodrama as a foundation for the plot certainly gives the film the basis for the heavy emotional overtones. Steve Martin is the epitome of the sensitive, caring,

loving father who only needs a family to make him whole again, much like John Kimball needed a new family to heal his past in Kindergarten Cop.

4.2.3 Big Daddy

Big Daddy (1999) has an interesting twist to the good father theme. First of all, Sonny Koufax, played by Adam Sandler, is not the biological father of the child in his care and in the end, after a perfunctory court battle, he does not become the legal father. Julian, the child that Sonny cares for throughout the movie, is reunited with his real father. In this film the important themes that have been illustrated previously, the importance of family and the possibility of the new sensitive, caring, and loving father are exhibited using the same technique, that of creating a father-child bond, thus maturing the father and giving him a reason to make himself into the better man. One other interesting deviation in this film is found in the choice of character that this 'new man' will be molded from. Previously we have seen a heroic, macho man become a sensitive kindergarten teacher as well as a reclusive, miserly quiet man who learns to move past his previous hurt. This time the character of Sonny Koufax, the father figure, is basically a social deviant. Sonny Koufax is a slacker and is portrayed as a pathetic, self-obsessed slob. Sonny graduated from law school, so we know that he is intelligent. However, he has never taken his law exams, illustrating his total lack of ambition. He supports himself through a questionable lawsuit against a taxi driver who ran over his foot several years backs.

The implication is that Sonny bilked the system. To top it off, his girlfriend leaves him and he has no real relationship with his father.

Along comes the child. Julian, a five year old boy, was dropped off at Sonny's house by social services after Julian's mother passed away and asked that Julian be left with his father. Unlike Ted Kramer, Jack Butler or Michael McCann who all immediately realized their need to make the effort to learn to parent, Sonny continues to live his life as he always has, just bringing this new addition along for the ride. Sonny's lack of parenting skills is evident as he teaches Julian how to throw sticks at rollerbladers in the park and how to pee on the side of a building, and when Julian wets the bed, Sonny reacts as if he were a puppy and puts newspaper on the bed to soak up the urine and places Julian back on the bed on top of the newspaper. It isn't until Sonny is approached by Julian's teacher who expresses her concerns about Julian's lack of hygiene and odd behavior that Sonny begins to feel some responsibility for the care of this child. Now Sonny begins to learn through trial and error, the traits of fatherhood. He teaches Julian how to bathe and helps him with his homework. This newly evolved father figure now learns to express emotion to his own father. In a touching courtroom scene, filled mostly with comedic absurdities, Sonny calls himself to the stand and asks his lawyer father to cross-examine him. His father, being a no nonsense hard boiled type, tells Sonny that he will lose as he doesn't think he should have the child. Sonny then goes on to convince his father that he now understands what it means to truly love another

person and that he has transformed into a responsible, loving and caring adult ready to care for a child. Sonny convinces his dad as the camera pans across the courtroom crowd showing multiple people pulling out cell phones, phoning their parents to tell them they love them. The judge doesn't buy it and is ready to convict Sonny for fraud when Julian's real father steps forward, takes responsibility for his son Julian, and asks the court to forgive Sonny. The last scene of the movie is a fast forward, showing Sonny has indeed become that sensitive, caring and responsible parent. He has taken his exams and become a successful lawyer and now has a baby of his own.

The 1990s has been the decade that took the message of father knows best to a new level. Big Daddy closes out the decade with the message that even the socially deviant immature man can be transformed into a responsible, loving, caring father. As Susan Jeffords charged, "[...] a changed image of U.S. masculinity is being presented, an image that suggests that the hard-bodied male action heroes of the eighties have given way to a 'kinder, gentler' U.S. manhood, one that is sensitive, generous, caring, and, perhaps most importantly, capable of change" ("The Big Switch" 197). Jeffords continues this argument by agreeing that the 'new man' can, in some instances, be seen as a positive change however, the danger arises in that the new model of manhood still does not "address the consequences of the privileges associated with white U.S. masculinities" ("The Big Switch" 197). And, finally, Jeffords notes that the "new man" is portrayed as a victim to the previously

prescribed roles of macho masculinity, while neglecting the historical structures that have for so long prescribed stifling and constrictive roles for women.

4.3 Reinforcing Patriarchy

The third characteristic of what I have identified as the ‘father knows best’ themes found in movies is how the films are used to reinforce patriarchy. Jude Davies and Carol R. Smith find that patriarchy can be reinforced through some of these “new man” behaviors previously discussed. “[...] the emphasis on paternity, and the proliferation of representations of white males as fathers in films from the late 1980s on, often function as relatively new strategies for reproducing white patriarchal hegemony by annexing personal qualities hitherto types as ‘feminine’” (18). Fred Pfeil explains that the ‘new man’ affixed qualities of compassion and caring in an effort to shore up power that they felt they were in danger of losing. “[...] the ‘sensitive guy’ movies of 1991 is not finally to give up power, but to emerge from a temporary, tonic power shortage as someone more deserving of its possession and more compassionate in its exercise” (49). What type of ‘temporary, tonic power shortage’ is Pfeil referring to? According to Ryan and Kellner, there were two basic points of instability that could potentially disrupt the hegemony of patriarchy; these two areas were the family and sexuality. (157) Naturally, in the hope of shoring up the dominance of patriarchy, the family was a prime area of concern. Elizabeth G. Traube argues that the family was indeed an area of contestation. She writes, “If the traditional family needs such passionate defenders, it is because it is indeed under

attack, or rather, the old form of family life based on gender domination is no longer taken for granted” (25). And the finger was pointed squarely at women for the destruction of the family. “As the seventies developed, women came increasingly under attack for destroying the family” (Ryan and Kellner 157). What was needed was a restoration of the father figure as the head of the family and a call for the return of the traditional family in order to recapture the power invested in patriarchy. John Belton, in writing about many of the late 1970s blockbuster films, said even they were used as a means to perpetuate authority. “They restore and reaffirm the authority of the father” (19). And, as previously mentioned in the discussion of Mr. Mom, Robin Woods defines two particular techniques in film that patriarchy has used to battle the destruction of familial domination; the plot to show that ultimately women are unhappy when they are ‘liberated’ and what they really want is to go back home and secondly, the plot that shows that men/fathers can be better than women/mothers.

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, patriarchy was reconfirmed by exhibiting the ultra macho action adventure man as well as illustrating at the same time that a father can take the place of a mother and, indeed, do a better job. In the 1990s this ultra macho man finds he has a sensitive side and the fathers are doing an even better job as they get more in touch with mothering through their newly found feminine traits. Now in the first decade of the twentieth century, I will argue that the same “father is in charge man”, though he still exhibits some tenderness, is showing

a shift towards a more dominant father takes charge type of individual. Probably the best example of this shift is a close analysis of the film The Pacifier (2005) starring Vin Diesel.

4.3.1 The Pacifier

In the most obvious sense, The Pacifier can be interpreted as a rework of Kindergarten Cop. In both of these movies a law-enforcer prototype, (Schwarzenegger as a police detective, Diesel as a Navy Seal on orders to protect a family), is the protagonist and ends up in a situation where they are caring for young children while trying to perform their jobs. Both of these male leads are well known for their ultra-macho action adventure movies before taking on these new roles, (Schwarzenegger famous for his Terminator and Conan the Barbarian roles; Vin Diesel famous for his roles in The Fast and the Furious and Pitch Black). Both Kindergarten Cop and The Pacifier involve intense scenes of action adventure, both films start out with an opening scene of intense violence which sets up the characters as being tough, fierce, and prone to violence to get done what needs to get done. Both movies also involve a transformation of the lead character from the hard-boiled action hero to a softer, more caring and loving father figure. However, perhaps the intervening fifteen years between the productions of these two movies has brought about a re-evaluation of the sensitive man character. The key difference between these two films can be found in the degree of transformation that occurs in these two

protagonists. Additionally, The Pacifier also includes character types that help to define the difference between the 'real' manly man and the macho-man wannabee.

The Pacifier begins as a typical high action adventure film with opening scenes of Navy Seal commandos working to rescue an American computer expert who is being targeted by foreign governments that want to steal the software program he has developed for missile defense programs. The scene involves speeding powerboat rescues, helicopters, jet skis, explosions, gun fire, and doors being kicked in. Vin Diesel, playing Lieutenant Shane Wolf gives out with his personal motto and defining statement when he yells, "We're going to do it my way, no highway options." In fact, the one small scene of tenderness that Diesel allows results in total disaster, thus reminding him that emotion can be deadly. Diesel allows Howard Plummer, the rescued American, to call his family and because of that slight moment of delay, they end up in a barrage of gunfire with Plummer being killed and Diesel being wounded. At this point in the film it looks like a typical 1980s action adventure, Diesel is muscular, extremely physical, engaging in hand to hand combat, kicking down doors and risking his life for his country. Now the scene will change as Diesel is being sent on his new assignment. This time he is assigned to protect the family of Howard Plummer, the American who was killed in the unsuccessful rescue attempt. Upon Diesel's arrival to Plummer's home he is greeted by a child screaming at the door and chaos erupting throughout the house. Plummer looks around in dread. Julie Plummer, the widow of Howard and the mother to their

five children, is about to leave for Switzerland to try and retrieve the software from Howard's secret bank vault. This sets the stage for the heart of the story to come, Diesel is now in charge of five children, with no experience and no help, (the nanny quits within a few days of his arrival).

Diesel is not impressed with the running of the Plummer household as he looks around and says, "Doesn't anyone understand discipline?" implying that the mother is too soft and doesn't know properly how to care for children. Diesel immediately tells the children that they are in for a "rude awakening." His first morning running the household starts at 6am with Diesel blowing a whistle and lining the children up. He explains that their behavior is "unacceptable." He proceeds to inform them of his governing principle, "We're going to do it MY way, no highway options!" Though Diesel is clearly out of his element, he seems to know from the start that the mother's way is not the "right" way and that it will be up to him to get the household in order.

The now familiar diapering scenes come into play, suggesting that there are some things women are probably more natural at, like changing diapers. Diesel uses tongs to try to change the baby's diaper and ends up dunking the baby into the toilet to clean him. Instead of cooking he serves the children military ready to eat packages. The typical chaos ensues with children running wildly, the tablecloth being pulled from the table, the baby screaming and a phone call from the high school informing them that the kids are about to be late to school. Evidently, mom

hasn't been too responsible about this either as this is the last warning for these children. Diesel scrambles the children into the van, can't figure out the child restraint system so he ties a large knot in it, and drives off to school in the family mini-van with the words, "World's Greatest Mother" boldly emblazoned on it, suggesting that Diesel himself will soon be aspiring to the title.

At this point in the movie, an interesting foil is introduced in the character of Vice Principal Murney, played by Brad Garrett. Murney is also the wrestling coach and considers himself to be a macho and ultra-masculine man in every way. He reinforces this belief by making fun of others and belittling anything he considers to be 'girly.' In all this effort Murney comes across as an egotistical, inconsiderate blowhard, undermining his own efforts to be considered masculine. Pitting Diesel, who really is ultra masculine, against Murney, who just wears the artifice of being manly, sets the stage for a new definition of manhood.

Shane (Diesel) continues to protect and learns to nurture this family, which he begins to see as his own family. The kids, though resistant to the new rules and discipline enforced on them by Shane, begin to accept him and see moments of true caring. Shane takes on mothering with gusto. He finds out that part of his job includes being a "den mother" to a troop of Girl Scouts. In the end, Shane teaches the girls to defend themselves by giving them instruction in karate after an incident where the girls had their cookies stolen by a group of boys. The girls learn their lessons well and in the next conflict instigated by the boys, the girls beat up the boys

and tie them to the store front pillar's using the boys own bandanas. In the meantime, the older kids throw a big party at the house, interrupted by Shane who instructs all the kids in attendance to clean up and make it right. Once again, Shane uses his physical intimidation to discipline, something the mother cannot do. But Shane is not without his soft side. After tracking Seth to a rehearsal of The Sound of Music, he finds out that Seth wants to be an actor and has been hiding it because of the ridicule he gets from school mates and especially Vice Principal Murney. Seth wants to quit the wrestling team and take drama, but is afraid to confront Murney. Shane takes Seth's side and encourages his talent, even going so far as to take over as director of the play when the previous director quit. Shane also encourages Seth to stand up to Murney, quit wrestling and dedicate himself to his passion. Shane eventually endears himself to each of the children. He teaches Zoe, the teenaged girl to drive, supporting her and believing in her all the way. He learns to dance and sing the "Peter Panda song" to help little Peter go to sleep at night. He reads bedtime stories to the youngest daughter Lulu, though he changes the stories to a military war story. In essence, Diesel has become all things to all the children, both father and mother, the encourager and the protector. The Principal of the school, Claire Fletcher, introduced earlier as a former Navy member, remarks to Shane about how much better the children are doing now that he is in charge. Again, we see that the father-figure is doing a better job than the mother had been able to do. Diesel makes

a better mother because he can discipline, protect and nurture, which the children's real mother doesn't seem to have been able to do.

In one final confrontation between the manly wannabe Vice Principal Murney and the 'real' man Shane comes in a wrestling match instigated by Murney. Murney seems convinced that he can beat Shane in wrestling and has taunted and challenged Shane throughout the movie. Finally, Shane agrees to a match with Murney after he catches Murney belittling Seth for wanting to quit wrestling. Shane uses Murney for comic relief as he twists him into various positions that he defines as "the Chicken Wing" and "the Pacifier" clearly making fun of Murney and establishing himself as not only the winner of the wrestling match, but the winner of the masculinity contest that it implied.

Like Kindergarten Cop, The Pacifier ends with both a huge action adventure scene where the lives of the children in their care are in peril and finally with a confirmation of the transformation in the heroes. In the closing adventure scene in The Pacifier, Shane has to call on all his skills, including his newly acquired skill of singing and dancing the "Peter Panda" song and dance, in order to save the day. Here we have the macho hero, singing and dancing to a kid's song, but still retaining his masculine characteristics in full force. The final showdown includes the typical car chase and machine-gun wielding bad guy, but in the end, naturally, our hero saves the day, with a little help from his friends, including Principal Claire Fletcher. However, there is one more task ahead for the hero in The Pacifier as its opening

night for The Sound of Music with Shane directing and Seth in a starring role. In the end, Shane is seriously considering staying and not continuing with his job as a Navy Seal, much like John Kimball in Kindergarten Cop. The transformation of these men from macho enforcer to family father figure requires a change in career as well. For John Kimball the transformation goes full circle and he takes on a job that is highly encoded as feminine, that of a kindergarten teacher. For Shane Wolf, the upcoming transformation is not going to be quite as profound as he is offered the position of the wrestling coach at the high school, still a masculine encoded job. The Pacifier as a reworking of Kindergarten Cop takes a slight shift in the portrayal of the final transformation of the hero. Lieutenant Shane Wolf, though still portrayed as a sensitive, caring, father-figure, seems to hold back from a total transformation; instead Shane seems to incorporate emotion and caring into his ultra macho persona without losing the deeply entrenched masculinity that the film starts with. The pendulum seems to be swinging back to allow for more balance in this father figure. This also allows for this father to usurp the mothering role more effectively by incorporating both his masculine tendencies with his new found more feminine traits.

4.3.2 The Pursuit of Happyness

Another popular film featuring a father left to raise a son alone, much on the lines of Kramer vs. Kramer, is The Pursuit of Happyness, based on the true life story of Christopher Gardner. In both of these films the father is thrust into full time caregiving of a single young son while trying to make a living. The most notable

difference is in how this single-fatherhood came about. In Kramer vs. Kramer, Ted Kramer is suddenly left caring for his son when his wife leaves him. The implication throughout the film was that caring for the child should have been the mother's job and that by leaving she was abandoning her duties as wife and mother. Additionally, in the case of Kramer, Ted Kramer was providing more than adequately on the financial front for his family, he had a wonderful well paying job and had, in fact, just landed a major account which earned him a rather large promotion. In The Pursuit of Happyness this is not the case. Chris Gardner is not providing at all for his family, he is a salesman trying desperately to sell a very expensive bone-density scanning machine to local area physicians, and he isn't very successful. His girlfriend and mother of his child, Linda, is working double shifts to bring home the family's only real source of income. The family is several months behind in rent and living in squalor. Linda receives a promising job offer out of town and wants to take their five year old son, Christopher, with her. This time the mother is trying to do the best thing for her child but she is stopped by a powerful father figure who will have none of it. Chris refuses to allow Linda to take Christopher with her and in a sneaky move, arrives at Christopher's day care center early to pick him up and take him before Linda can get there. Chris insists on keeping Christopher and eventually Linda buckles and allows him to stay.

From that point forward the story focuses solely on Chris Gardner's valiant and eventually highly successful attempts to provide the best he can for his young

son. But this doesn't happen before they are evicted from their apartment and are forced to live on the street, sleeping overnight in a subway restroom. One has to wonder at this point if the boy might not have been better off with his mother after all. In the end, Chris lands a lucrative job with Dean Witter and becomes extremely successful, asking us to accept that all well's that ends well.

One of the not so discreet messages in this film is that of father's rights and that fathers should have equal access to parenting the children in the case of a separation between the parents. Equality would be one thing, but in the case of Chris Gardner, the message is that he bullied his wife into giving up their child. There was no court case, no deciding who could be the better parent or where the child would be better off. Instead, it was back to the father being the head of the family and making the final decision without regard for the mother. The Pursuit of Happyness is another clear cut case of hegemonic ideology working behind the scenes and slipping in a message reconfirming patriarchy without it really being noticed, much like Cheaper by the Dozen. The focus of Happyness was the rags to riches tale of a man who had nothing and through sheer tenacity was able to gain riches. It is only by looking closely at the roles of the mother and the father in this movie and their interaction with one another and the child that the undercover message can be brought to life. For fathers, it is a story of possibility, not just for riches, but for taking charge of their families.

4.3.3 Daddy's Little Girls

One last film worth discussing is Daddy's Little Girls released in February, 2007. Especially compelling is the tag line to this movie, "Having children made him a father. Taking care of them made him a man," as well as the advertising on the back of the DVD cover which promotes this movie as being about the "essence of fatherhood." The tag line, in particular, is worth noting as it implies that it is the father's job to take on the role of care-giver. This is a film in which the father, Monty, with an initial reluctance, takes on the full time care of his three daughters after the death of their previous caretaker, his mother in law, the grandmother of the girls. This is a film where the mother figure is shown to be not only incompetent as a mother, but a drug dealing prostitute who decides she wants to fight for custody of her children. At one point, Monty is forced to leave the girls unsupervised while he goes to work. After a small fire breaks out, the court awards custody to the mother. Monty then does what a good father should do and fights and eventually regains custody of his children. He is clearly the better parent. This time, the court finally agrees with the father and grants full custody to him, unlike previous court cases we have examined (Kramer vs. Kramer, Big Daddy) where the father lost in court. Of course, it must be noted that the mother in this film was portrayed as especially evil and unfit. However, the earlier court case in the film did award custody to the mother, assuming she could be the better parent, just because she was the mother, even though it was clearly evident to all concerned that the mother was definitely an

unfit parent. On interesting note is that the focus of these two fathering films (The Pursuit of Happyness and Daddy's Little Girls) has turned back to drama and away from the comedic aspects of fathering.

Some trends of cinema fathers from the 1970s through the late 1990s, seem to Ryan and Douglas Kellner, Jude Davies and Carol R. Smith. The 1970s brought about the initial resistance against the changing family, as Ryan and Kellner noted, "In a number of films, images of loving, nurturing fathers are contrasted with prejudicial images of selfish mother" (157). As Davis and Smith argue, the 1980s continued this trend of nurturing fathers, using this as a method for reproducing patriarchy (18). Susan Jeffords writes a great deal about the male action adventure hero and his 1990s transformation into a kinder, gentler transformed man in "Can Masculinity be Terminated?" and "The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the 1990s." By looking at representative films spanning from the 1970s through the end of the 1990s, we can recognize the progression identified by these authors. The movies focusing on fathers thus far in the twentieth century seem to be an amalgam of many of the techniques used in previous decades for reaffirming patriarchy. The drama cycle concerning fathers seems to be regaining in popularity with films such as The Pursuit of Happyness. The he-man ultra macho hero from the 1980s is still being transformed, though the transformation seems a little more tempered than those of the 1990s, as is evidenced in The Pacifier.

This chapter was premised on the argument that there are four basic underlying issues surrounding the “father knows best” ideology: 1) fathers can make better parents than mothers, which allows for 2) men to show emotions and exhibit gentleness and kindness, which requires 3) a reinforcement of patriarchy; the previous three points resulting in 4) a response to and attack on feminism. As previously mentioned, the first three items follow a somewhat linear pattern, however, the fourth item, a response to and attack on feminism, is an underlying premise to the entire ideology and can be identified throughout these ‘father knows best’ movies. In the next chapter the issue of patriarchy affirming films which seek primarily to gain power by attacking feminism will be explored.

CHAPTER FIVE

MOMMY DEAREST

According to Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, patriarchy was primarily threatened in the 1970s, on two fronts by society's growing tolerance for women's equality. They write, "Women's struggle for liberation from male social power and for equality directly affected two arenas in which male power was particularly felt by women—the family and sexuality" (157). It is, indeed, these two areas where patriarchy attacks mothers, as portrayed in many motion pictures. The first method identified is the process whereby women are being told that they need to stay at home and take care of children for two basic reasons, first, the children will be better off and secondly, women are only truly happy when they are fulfilling their basic roles and responsibilities to the family unit. The second method utilized in film is that of showing how an independent, career woman can become a direct attack on the family unit.

5.1 Mommy Come Home

In her essay, "Who Will Do the Caring?" Elizabeth G. Traube summarizes the history of the debate over working mothers. Traube explains that working class women have had to seek full time or part time employment in order to help provide for the family, however, their role as wife and mother always remained as a priority.

Since post-World War II, Traube argues, a trend began which included women from all walks of life desiring the ability to pursue employment. Since mothers have traditionally been defined as the nurturer and caregiver, the fear of “who will do the caring?” began to develop. According to Traube, this was the root cause of the attack on working mothers, as well as the beginnings of the defense of the traditional family. The battle lines were drawn, not just between patriarchy and feminism, but between stay at home mothers and working mothers. The war cry of the defenders of the traditional family was that these over-ambitious mothers were going to destroy the family. There were several directions that this new attack would take; one was to show how working mothers could not possibly take care of their family. “Defenders of the traditional family ideal contrast its ever-present mothers and watchful fathers to the negligent parents of permissive households—the ambitious working mothers, determined to ‘have it all’” (Traube 131).

Another defense was launched by turning fathers into good mothers, as was evidenced in many of the films found in Chapter Three. “These men become the replacements for women whose work has interfered with their ability to mother their children” (Jeffords, “Can Masculinity be Terminated?” 254). Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin also see that several films of this type, such as Baby Boom (1987), suggested the extreme difficulty if not impossibility of women managing both a career and a family” (279).

A third method that patriarchy employed was to try to convince mothers that they would never truly find happiness and contentment until they committed themselves to performing their 'natural' roles, that of full time caregiver. Robin Wood writes that, "There is the plot about the liberated woman who proves she's as good as the man but then discovers that this doesn't make her happy and that what she really wanted all the time was to serve him" (213). Elizabeth G. Traube agrees and writes, "From this viewpoint, a woman may go against nature and pursue an independent life, but she achieves true fulfillment only in accepting the sacrifices of motherhood and devoting herself to others" (131).

Usually these tactics are used in tandem, such as the case previously examined in Cheaper by the Dozen. Here we have Kate Baker with a larger than normal mothering responsibility, having twelve children to care for. Life in the Baker household is not without the normal chaos of a large family; however, Kate is there full time for her husband and children and always manages to save the day. This is contrasted with what happens to the family when Kate agrees to go on a book tour and is away from home. No sooner has Kate left home than things completely fall apart. Crisis after crisis ensues and Dad just doesn't have a clue as to how to pull things together. In the end, Kate realizes how badly things have deteriorated at home and quits the book tour in order to try to fix everything at home. On top of this, Kate is just not happy being away from her family. She is shown sitting in the middle of a rather large hotel room bed, seemingly lost without her children. Kate finds out that

what really fulfills her and makes her happy is to be a full time caregiver to her children, not her aspirations as an up and coming author, and nowhere is the model of being able to do both, like the original mother of the cheaper by the dozen clan, available.

Mr. Mom, tells us the story of a mother who enjoyed being at home full time with her children, but in order to help out the family, goes back to work when her husband is laid off from his job. She is successful in her job, though she has to fend off the sexual advances of her boss. However, we see signs throughout the film that Caroline Butler is not really happy in the career world. She misses her family and her role as their primary care-giver. Although she has the ability to go out and make a living, her real passion is in taking care of her children. Her husband, Jack, has also been successful at learning how to be the full time caregiver to the children, but he, too, just isn't completely happy without his wife at home to take care of the children and family. In the end, all is resolved as Jack goes back to work and Caroline goes back home.

Parenthood (1989) a film directed by Ron Howard, stars Steve Martin as Gil Buckman, an attorney and the head of a traditional family who wants to be a hands-on type of father. His wife is Karen Buckman (played by Mary Steenbergen) is a stay at home mother. The Buckman family is contrasted throughout the film with other family types, including, Buckman's sister Helen Lampkin, a divorced mother raising two teenagers and Buckman's other sister, Susan Huffner, a mother and a full

time teacher married to a man who is obsessed with the potential intelligence and educational opportunities for their only child. All of these family types are contrasted against the family of origin, Gil's parents, Frank and Marilyn Buckman, a very old-fashioned traditional family where the father is not involved with the raising of the children. Each of these family types is shown to have particular deficiencies and problems; however, the traditional family, with an involved father (Gil and Karen Buckman) are depicted as having the more well-adjusted family, with each of the other family types aspiring for the same model.

In looking at this model family type we see Gil Buckman, an attorney who has passed up promotions in order to have more time with his family. The movie opens with a flashback of Gil as a child sitting at a baseball game with an usher, whom his father has paid to watch over him. This is juxtaposed with Gil at a baseball game in the present day, sitting with his family and enjoying the game alongside his children. On the ride home, in the characteristic family mini-van, the family sings songs, tells jokes, and enjoys one another's company. Upon arriving at home both parents set about getting the children ready for bed. Gil is seen carrying one sleeping child into bed, followed by Karen and Gil saying good night to each child. Gil is then comforting his daughter only to find out she is sick to her stomach, and though Karen has to arrive in time to actually take care of the sick child, Gil is shown to at least be trying. Karen Buckman is the prototype of the perfect stay at home mother and the picture of domesticity. Later in the movie, while Karen is in

the kitchen busily preparing for her son's birthday party, Karen tells both Susan and Helen how much she enjoys being a full time mother and how she doesn't understand why other mother's look down on her for that decision. Karen is also the picture of maternity as the mother of three children, expecting her fourth. Though Gil and Karen are shown to have parenting challenges, (their son Kevin is believed by the school to have emotional issues which require therapy), they are still portrayed as a perfect model of what a traditional family can be. Several key American icons of the 'perfect' family are drawn on throughout the film, the baseball game, the family mini-van, and the child's birthday party, thus embedding even further the ideology centered around the model of the traditional family.

Immediately contrasted with this model is the family unit of Gil's sister Helen. Helen is pictured as somewhat masculine in her appearance sporting short hair and generally wearing suits. She is also a full time professional, (a bank executive). Elizabeth G. Traube describes Helen:

Helen's masculinized nature is heavily marked in the movie. She is the breadwinner, of course, and the movie more than hints at an unresolved case of penis envy. She keeps a vibrator in the bedroom for her sexual pleasure, wishes that her ex would drop his drill down his pants, and recalls how at Woodstock she once urinated in a field.

(155)

Naturally, a full time career mother, most especially a single-mother, is not going to have well adjusted children, and this is glaringly obvious with Helen's family. Both of her children, son Gary who is thirteen, and daughter Julie who is sixteen, are having huge emotional problems. Gary is described by Gil as "a kid who really has problems." Julie ends up running away with her boyfriend after many angry fights with her mother. These two teens do not only have to deal with a mother who works full time, but also with abandonment by their father. Traube notes that, "Divorce has left adolescent Gary and his older sister Julie in the dreaded 'father absent' situation" (154).

The third family type that is modeled in Parenthood is that of a mother working full time as a teacher (Susan Huffner) with an unemployed academic father (Nathan Huffner). Again, this is not the 'natural' patriarchal order of family life. In this case the father is too involved in child-raising, focusing all of his time and energy on the development of their young daughter. Contrasts between the children in the Huffner and Buckman families are continually drawn using scenes of the young Buckman children frolicking outdoors on the playground and Patti Huffner being subjected to hours of flashcards and study. Additionally, we find out that Susan really wants to be more of a mother, not just to Patti, but she wants to have another baby and fulfill her maternal instincts. Nathan objects to this idea, perhaps feeling threatened that Susan wants to take over more of the childcare.

The last family unit that is paralleled is that of the original family unit consisting of Frank Buckman as head of the house and his wife, Marilyn. They are the parents of Gil, Helen, Susan, and Larry. The senior Buckman family are pictured as the idealized form of the prototypical 1950s family with a full time stay at home mother and a father who believes it is the mother's job to take care of the children and his job to be the breadwinner. Frank, played by Jason Robards, is shown as a cold and distant father figure who rarely interacted with his children. This is in direct contrast to Gil who wants to be an involved father and Nathan who is shown to be an overly involved father, to the point of taking over the mother's job and causing his wife heartache who desires to have that job.

The final scene of the movie hammers down the main theme, that of fortifying the idea of the traditional family with a full time stay at home mother. This is shown not only by the portrayal of Gil and Karen Buckman's family, but also by showing how the other family types are moving towards becoming more like the Buckman family. In the case of Helen, she becomes involved with Gary's biology teacher, eventually marrying him. Susan finally gets through to Nathan and he agrees that they should have another child. Traube describes the closing scene:

The final scene discovers Helen in a delivery room, giving birth to the biology teacher's baby, while outside in the waiting room every female character of reproductive age turns out to be either a recent or an expectant mother. What this means in narrative terms is that every

woman has been brought closer to Karen's model, while every man who needed transformation has become a little more like Gil. (155)

The bottom line is that life just works better when the traditional family model is followed.

In a nod to the realization that in many cases the traditional family with a full time mother is not a real choice for some women, there have several films built around the model of a full time working mother, usually not the biological mother, however, that is in the role of full time caregiver and therefore must change her career in some way in order to make an adjustment and find a balance for motherhood. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin detail this problem, "Anxieties about new gender roles were also on display in the few Hollywood films of the era that dealt with women in the workplace. Several films of this type, such as Baby Boom (1987), suggested the extreme difficulty if not impossibility of women managing both a career and family" (279). Three films, Baby Boom, released in 1987, Raising Helen, (2004) and a recent film, No Reservations (July 2007) all depict this same theme, a mother (or surrogate mother) cannot possibly juggle both a career and motherhood and therefore, something must give. It is also interesting to note that in all of these films, in order for the mother to be portrayed as incompetent, it must be a mother-figure, a woman who has never had a child of her own, and therefore lacks the instinctual, naturalized mothering skills that a biological mother would be assumed to have. These films use the comedic device much like the films

which ridicule fathers do; they show how someone who is not “natural” for the role they are taking on behaves in circumstances that they are not prepared to handle.

In Baby Boom, Diane Keaton plays the role of J.C. Wyatt, a high powered executive. The voice-over narration tells us that J.C. Wyatt “has a salary in six figures, a corner apartment in the right part of town, and a live-in lover who is her perfect match because he, too, is a workaholic” (Baby Boom). Everything in J.C.’s life seems in perfect synch, until she receives an “inheritance” from a long-lost cousin in England. Expecting money, J.C. is totally unprepared for the package she picks up at the airport, a little girl. J.C. is left with no choice but to care for the little girl until she can find an adoptive family. The typical gags surround J.C. as she tries to care for this child, the same types of gags found in the fathering films, such as how to put on a diaper and how to quiet a crying baby. J.C. is shown to be completely unmaternal in every way. And yet, when the time comes to give up the baby to the adoption agency, she cannot bring herself to do it. Instead, she decides to raise the little girl by herself, with no help comes from her boyfriend, who has decided he cannot cope with raising a child and leaves. J.C. realizes that there is no way she can continue on the corporate ladder that she has been on for so long, that life with a child is simply not compatible to life in the fast lane, and so she quits. J.C. then packs up the little girl and all her belongings and moves to a farmhouse in Vermont where she settles in to raise her daughter. After just about using up her savings in taking care of the old farmhouse, J.C. starts her own business, making

gourmet baby-food, eventually making millions of dollars. J.C. is faced with a decision when the company she used to work for in Manhattan offers to buy her new baby food company, however, this would include a move back to the city. J.C. doesn't have to think long before she realizes that the trade off she made, motherhood instead of Manhattan, was the right choice after all. This way, J.C. can have it all, she works mostly out of her little farmhouse, she gets to keep and raise her daughter, and along the way she meets and falls in love with the local veterinarian. The family is now complete.

Raising Helen (2004) follows much this same pattern. Helen Harris, like J.C. has a high powered job and lives in the fast paced city of Manhattan. She has a career as the personal assistant to the director of a top modeling agency. Helen works hard and parties hard and is completely unprepared when her sister and her husband are killed in a car accident, leaving the care of their children to Helen. Helen, like J.C., quickly finds out that raising a family is not compatible with a fast-paced Manhattan career. Helen loses her job and is forced to move out of Manhattan and into neighboring Queens and a lower-middle class neighborhood. Eventually, Helen learns the lessons of parenthood, but not without help from Pastor Dan, the director of a nearby Lutheran school where Helen enrolls the children. Again, like Baby Boom, Helen learns how to mother and is rewarded with love and a father-figure for her children.

More recently, the same scenario is presented in No Reservations, a film starring Catherine Zeta-Jones as Kate Armstrong, a master chef employed at a fancy restaurant in Manhattan. Kate is depicted as obsessive, controlling and a perfectionist, whose boss insists that she go to therapy. Kate is anything but maternal. Like the previous two movies, Kate's sister dies in a car accident, leaving guardianship of her daughter Zoë, to Kate. Kate, like her predecessors, has no idea how to care for a child. She serves Zoë gourmet food, which Zoë refuses to eat. She buys a room full of toys and admits to her therapist, "I have no idea how to take care of a kid." A new chef, Nick, hired to help out at the restaurant while Kate was taking time out after her sister's death, is the opposite of Kate in many ways. He is full of joy and emotion, he sings opera in the kitchen, jokes around with the staff, and seems to enjoy life to the fullest. It is Nick who actually connects with Zoë and helps Kate through the difficult process of learning how to parent. Kate faces the same challenges of trying to balance work and family, and in the end quits her job at the restaurant. At the conclusion, Kate and Nick open their own bistro, allowing Zoë to be as involved as possible.

The message is complete. Mothers need to devote themselves to be full time caregivers if at all possible. This makes for a happy, healthy, well adjusted family as well as a happier mother, (Cheaper by the Dozen, Mr. Mom, Parenthood). If it isn't possible for the mother to stay at home full time, then at the very least, she must choose to somehow adjust her work and career to allow her time to be a primary care

giver as well. (Baby Boom, Raising Helen, No Reservations). The films accomplish this goal by convincingly showing family life that works well only with a full time mother and highlights the problems that occur when a mother is distracted or otherwise not fully devoted to being a full time caregiver. These rather simplistic views do not take into account the vast number of single mothers who cannot adjust their work and careers in order to have more time to parent, nor do they take into account the large number of families where both parents must work in order to provide for their children. And finally, this view of patriarchy does not even allow for the exception of a successful, happy, and working mother.

5.2 The Destroyer of Families

The second method commonly used to demonstrate how important it is for the family to have a full time stay at home mother, is by depicting how career women, mothers or not, destroy the family unit. As noted earlier, Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin write that, “[...] many of these films celebrate the new man by demonizing the new woman” (276). Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner write that, “women came increasingly under attack for destroying the family” (157). Three films in particular reveal the nature of this attack, Fatal Attraction (1987), The Hand that Rocks the Cradle (1992) and Disclosure (1994). In two of these films, a high-powered and out of control sexually aggressive single career woman goes after a man with a family. In the third film, a mother’s desire to work outside the home, even in a part-time role, invites disaster into her home.

Fatal Attraction (1987) is a classic stay at home versus career story featuring Glenn Close as the single career woman Alex Forrest, juxtaposed against Anne Archer, a stay at home mother, Beth Gallagher. Beth is married to Dan Gallagher, a successful New York attorney and they have one six year old daughter, Ellen. While Beth and Ellen are out of town for the weekend, Dan has a brief affair with Alex. Dan, portrayed to be happily married, believes this to be just a weekend tryst and wants nothing more than to go on with his life as if nothing happened. Alex, on the other hand, is not willing to let go of Dan and her desires for a continued relationship. Alex begins to stalk Dan, spying on him, showing up in unexpected places, and leaving threatening voice messages. She tells Dan that she is pregnant in hopes of getting him to continue a relationship with her. Eventually, Dan confesses everything to his wife, Beth. Beth forgives Dan and in a phone conversation warns Alex to stay away from Dan. Alex kidnaps Ellen but returns her home unharmed, though Beth is injured in a car accident while out searching for Ellen. In the end, Alex, determined to get rid of Beth, attacks her in the bathtub with a butcher knife. Dan hears the screaming, runs into the bathroom, and drowns Alex in the tub. However, the twist is that Alex did not die and in the end it is Beth who has to finally kill Alex, shooting her with a gun.

Embedded within this thriller are portraits of the sinister career woman set against the innocent mother, in fact, the obvious story of what happens when a married man is unfaithful, is nearly overpowered in the obvious criticism and fear of

the dangerous independent woman who is threatening the stability of the nuclear family. Liahna Babener writes:

In spite of the husband's culpability, however, the film underscores, rather than calls into question, the propriety of the patriarchal order. Through adroit narrative, verbal and visual manipulations, responsibility for the catastrophe is shifted from male wrongdoing to female predation; what begins as a tale of a man's violation of the trust of his loved ones turns into a misogynistic rant against the social posture and sexual autonomy of the independent woman. (26)

Patriarchy is reinforced and celebrated in Fatal Attraction in four basic ways, first the independent career woman is depicted as sinister and dangerous, second, the wife and full time mother is pictured as innocent and good, third, the violation of patriarchal norms is punished and fourth, in the end, the nuclear family with the stay at home mother is intact.

Jude Davies and Carol R. Smith explain that the critical reception of the character of Alex Forrest "was read as representing feminism in general, and in particular the entry of women into business careers, in a stigmatized manner" (26). Alex is described by Babener as being evil, "The figure of womanly evil is modernized in this Reagan era morality play, presented here as the self-advancing career woman Alex Forrest" (Babener 28). In the first introductions of Alex, Babener notes that:

She goes by a man's name, commands an executive income and gains entry into influential political circles. She is sexually aggressive and bitingly self-assured. Alex is meant to be viewed as the devilish antithesis of Dan's angelic wife, and the moral deck is stacked against her from the outset. She is made to seem coldly professional (rejecting love, marriage and children to pursue the fast track in the publishing world), then professionally irresponsible, neglecting her job as she becomes caught in the grip of pathological vengeance against Dan. (29)

Elaine Berland and Marilyn Wechter describe Alex as "beautiful and sexy" (37). Susan Bromley and Pamela Hewitt write that Alex is, "presented as sophisticated, independent, socially isolated, selfish, unfulfilled and sexually aggressive" (20).

Alex wants more than she is allowed to have. According to Berland and Wechter, Alex crosses the line not because of the affair she has with Dan, but in pursuit of a relationship and a family. They write:

Her fatal attraction is not her affair with Dan; if she had played by male rules—a one-night stand with no demands for commitment—she might have been allowed to escape unscathed. But she wanted it all: career, sexuality, the man and the baby. Her character is particularly faulted for wanting to contain within herself all of the female modes which have traditionally been considered opposite or separate: wife

and professional woman, mother and free spirit, sexual being and domestic helpmate. (42)

Bromley and Hewitt agree that what Alex really wants is to have it all, the high powered career, the sexuality, the home, the baby. They say “this battle represents her desire for the security of a home and family” (20). Patriarchy continually reinforces the belief that women are not allowed to have it all; unlike men, women must choose.

Alex has broken all the rules of patriarchy, she is independent instead of dependent on a man, she is career oriented instead of family oriented, and she is sexually aggressive instead of sexually passive. Beth, on the other hand, is depicted as dependent, family oriented and sexually passive. Bromley and Hewitt describe Beth, “By contrast, the wife/mother role enacted by Beth in the film is associated with innocence and naiveté, dependence, social support, self-sacrifice, fulfillment and sexual disinterest. The role represents the rejection of career in favor of the traditional virtues of home” (21). Susan Faludi describes Beth as “a sort of ‘neo-Victorian housewife, totally fulfilled, pouring tea, plinking on the piano, and making high art of face-powder application” (149). The representation of Beth is a mirror image of the representation of the Gallagher family unit. Liahna Babener describes the family as:

Shown almost exclusively in intimate and touching scenes, photographed in soft-focus and warm light, commemorated in the

profusion of family photographs that adorn the household like so many narcissistic effigies, the Gallagher's appear to epitomize the WASPish family archetype which has been sanctified in Moral Majority propaganda. (27)

The sweet obedient character of Beth is set in sharp contrast to the hard edged eventually psychotic character of Alex. Susan Faludi describes in detail the transformation of the original story "Diversion," written by James Dearden. Once again, similar to the story of Cheaper By the Dozen, the final motion picture gives a message that is in complete opposition to the intended message of the original conception of the author. Changes were made not only in character development, but also in plot. Dearden says the original message of his story was that he wanted "to examine how this man who inflicted pain, no matter how unintentionally, must eventually hold himself accountable" (Faludi 146). Movie executive, Sherry Lansing, was immediately drawn to the script because of the "film's potential to deliver a feminist message" (147). Faludi quotes Lansing as saying, "[...] what I liked in the short film was that the man is made responsible. That there are consequences for him. When I watched that short film, I was on the woman's side. And that's what I wanted to convey in our film. I wanted the audience to feel great empathy for the woman" (147). Obviously this was not the final message of the film. Instead, Fatal Attraction became a film that is considered to be highly misogynistic and anti-feminist. Benshoff and Griffin say, "In its representation of a

crazy career woman out to destroy the nuclear family, the film is a perfect example of the era's conservative backlash against independent women" (281). Bromley and Hewitt summarize Fatal Attraction, "The unflinching message of Fatal Attraction is that women who opt for the career track are to be viewed not merely as unfeminine, but also as destructive who must be themselves destroyed" (17). The original message placed fault with the adulterous husband, the final product places the blame squarely on the independent career woman. This was accomplished in several ways. First, the characters of Beth and Alex had to be set against each other, the nurturing mother versus the malevolent independent woman. "Dearden was sent back to his desk to turn the two women into polar opposites—as he puts it, 'the Dark Woman and the Light Woman'" (Faludi 149). Secondly, the character of Dan had to be softened and made to look less culpable. "With each rewrite, Dearden was pressured to alter the characters further; the husband became progressively more lovable, the single woman more venomous" (Faludi 147).

Specific plot changes were also made to further the patriarchal message. According to Faludi, the producer and director of Fatal Attraction, wanted to make sure the message of the good wife was solid and well understood. In the original script, Beth was portrayed as a schoolteacher anxious to return to her career. In the quest to make Beth fit the proper mold, the schoolteacher role was deleted, leaving Beth to tend to hearth and home full time with no distractions. The other significant plot change concerned the ending of the film and the demise of Alex. In the original

script, Alex slits her wrist and commits suicide. Deciding this was not enough punishment; the ending was rewritten and reshot, making for a much more violent ending and a more fitting punishment for Alex. In this ending, it is Beth who delivers the final judgment by shooting and killing Alex. It was up to Beth to keep the family unit together and intact.

This is a film where hegemony alone cannot be blamed for the final message. Instead, the director Adrian Lyne had a huge impact on the message of the film. Lyne was clearly anti-feminist. Faludi quotes Lyne in responding to his position on feminism, "It's kind of unattractive, however liberated and emancipated it is. It kind of fights the whole wife role, the whole childbearing role. Sure you got your career and your success, but you are not fulfilled as a woman" (150). He goes on to describe what he considers to be his ideal woman, "My wife has never worked. She's the least ambitious person I've ever met. She's a terrific wife. She hasn't the slightest interest in doing a career. She kind of lives this with me, and it's a terrific feeling. I come home and she's there" (150). An additional influence was Michael Douglas, the actor starring in the role of Dan Gallagher. He insisted that the role would not show him as a "weak or unheroic character" (Faludi 148). Faludi also quotes Douglas as saying:

If you want to know, I'm really tired of feminists, sick of them. They've really dug themselves into their own grave. Any man would be a fool who didn't agree with equal rights and pay but some

women, now, juggling with career, lover, children, wifehood, have spread themselves too thin and are very unhappy. (151)

The ending of Fatal Attraction affirms the pro-family message as the camera pans to the family portrait. “The closing scene zeroes in on a framed family picture of Dan, Beth and Ellen, an overworked but nonetheless powerful popular cultural image, constructed to evoke association of the stability and security of an idealized nuclear family, a beckoning to return to the safety of home and hearth” (Berland and Wechter 41). The independent, sexually aggressive career woman out to destroy this family has herself been destroyed. “The film’s finale marks the restoration of the law of the father, a galling throwback to the antifeminism of an earlier era and an injurious legacy for the present one” (Babener 33). The family is reunited and patriarchy is restored.

Disclosure (1994) is another film depicting the career woman as villainous set against the image of the wife and mother. The difference in Disclosure, however, is that in this case the wife and mother, Susan Hendler, is not a full time stay at home mother portrayed in the glowing terms that Beth Gallagher was. Instead, Susan Henley, who has kept her own last name after marriage, is an attorney trying to juggle her part-time career with her husband and two children. Susan is shown as a busy professional who cares deeply about her husband and family. Like Beth, Susan is supportive of her husband and does everything she can to help him deal with the crisis. As is the case with Dan Gallagher, Tom Sanders (also played by Michael

Douglas) is the target of a sexually aggressive high powered career woman. One key difference is that Tom is shown to be even more innocent than Dan. Tom, a computer analyst hoping for a big promotion, is disappointed when he finds out a former girlfriend, Meredith Johnson, has somehow forged ahead and gotten the promotion instead of himself or several other employees that Sanders considered to be in the running. On the day of the big announcement, Meredith requests a meeting with Tom under the guise of getting caught up on business matters. Tom finds himself alone with Meredith in her office where she begins to make sexual advances towards him. After initially seeming to be tempted, as patriarchy would tell us is perfectly natural for a man, Tom does the right thing, refuses to have sex with Meredith and leaves the office. The next morning he finds out that Meredith is accusing him of sexual harassment and the company wants to settle out of court and discretely move Tom off to another subdivision, one which Tom knows is in the process of being shut down. No one believes Tom's side of the story, but Tom decides to hire a lawyer and fight back. In the end, Tom does win the court battle, but only because of a lucky break. It turns out that when Tom had tried to call and leave a message for a co-worker while in Meredith's office, he was unable to disconnect the call because of Meredith's attack and the entire incident was recorded on a voice message.

Valerie S. Terry and Edward Schiappa argue that Disclosure is yet another form of backlash. They base their argument on four issues; 1) how female

executives are portrayed, 2) how other female characters are portrayed, 3) stereotypes concerning men and success, and 4) sympathy created for the lead male character. In looking specifically at contrasting representations of mothers and career women, female characters, both executives and other female characters will be examined more fully.

There are several professional female characters in Disclosure which Terry and Schiappa argue “perpetuate negative stereotypes of female executives” (71). First, the character of Meredith Johnson, played by Demi Moore, is the newly promoted Vice President who becomes the harasser of Tom Sanders. Meredith is portrayed as very sexual but not very intelligent in the technical running of the company for which she has just been promoted to Vice President. The implication is that Meredith didn’t necessarily receive her promotion for her job skills but instead for her looks, again, the implication continuing that a woman can’t have both brains and beauty.

Stephanie Kaplan is a female executive in Tom’s company that was initially passed over for the promotion, but in the closing moments of the film and after Meredith Johnson’s firing, Stephanie gets the job. On the surface many would argue that the fact that Stephanie was the one to receive the promotion to Vice President would make this a pro-feminist text. In fact, when the head of the company, Bob Gavin, makes the announcement of Stephanie’s promotion he makes a speech about “breaking the glass ceiling” and equal opportunity for all. Yet, Stephanie is another

character that fits the stereotypical norms of a woman having to behave more like a man than a woman in order to get the job. We know from the start that Stephanie is professionally qualified for the job as Tom comments on her professional expertise. Then, we see that Stephanie is not portrayed as a glamorous sexy female, like Meredith, but instead is a bit older (and thus wiser) completely in control professional. Stephanie never shows any emotion but instead does her work and conducts her business quietly and behind the scenes. Even though Stephanie becomes aware of corruption within the company, instead of making a scene, she goes quietly and gets the information where it needs to be without anyone knowing. Physically, Stephanie is portrayed as “competent, but not particularly feminine. [...] She is a tall woman with prematurely gray hair and a notably silent manner” (Terry and Schiappa 75). Other terms that Terry and Schiappa use to describe Stephanie are, “objective,” “a rational, nonemotional thinker,” “action oriented,” and “strong” (76). It is appropriate, then, that Stephanie become the token female to take an executive position in the company as she is most like the male executives in her behavior and attitudes.

Unlike Beth Gallagher in Fatal Attraction, the mother figure in Disclosure, Susan Hendler, is not portrayed as the ultimate homemaker. It starts with her name. Susan is already branded as a feminist because she has chosen not to take her husband’s surname, and has kept Henley as her name. Susan works part-time as an attorney, which, according to patriarchy, already places her in danger of being an

unsuccessful parent. The scenes involving her children paint a picture of a household not well under control. The opening scene of the film shows their young daughter reading her fathers emails off the computer. One is left to wonder why a young child would have unsupervised internet access, but we immediately find out it is because the mother is distracted by work, Susan is on a conference call. Later Susan complains of “cheerios in my file folders” as the family makes a last minute mad dash to the car to get off to the day’s activities. Terry and Schiappa say that, “Susan is a part-time attorney who is successful in the workplace but unsuccessful as a so-called traditional wife and mother. [...] the manner in which she cares for her children appear less than flattering” (79). Susan is also shown to be overly independent in telling Tom that he could just quit his job and she would work full time and support them, to which he angrily replies, “I can still support my family!” Once again, the implication is that Susan did not really have to work in the first place and if she were doing the right thing for her children, she would have stayed home and properly cared for them. Patriarchy reinforces the message that the best and most competent mothers are those that are willing to sacrifice careers in order to stay home and raise children on a full time basis.

Another film which reinforces the concept that the traditional family unit is only safe when the mother devotes herself to full time care-giving is The Hand that Rocks the Cradle (1992). In this film, the mother of two young children, Claire Bartel, nearly loses her entire family seemingly because she chooses to pursue

outside interests which take her away from full time care. At the beginning of the film, Claire is seen fulfilling her duty at home as she squeezes oranges for breakfast while her husband, Michael, is upstairs shaving and singing operatic excerpts with his daughter Emma. All seems well in the Bartel household. Elayne Rapping describes the Bartel family as a “Father Knows Best model” (3). The opening scene of domestic bliss is quickly followed by the appearance of the mentally challenged African-American; Solomon who has been hired by the Bartel’s to build the iconic white picket fence around their property. Everything seems perfect for this model family until Claire has a visit with a new obstetrician and is molested by the doctor. Michael encourages Claire to report the incident after which several other women come forward to testify against this doctor. The physician, Dr. Mott, takes his own life, leaving his pregnant wife to deal with the aftermath of not only his suicide but the legal proceedings stemming from the sexual assault charges. Mrs. Mott suffers a breakdown resulting in the death of her unborn child as well as leaving her sterile.

Fast forwarding several months, we find out that Claire has been volunteering her time as a botanist at a local garden. Lucy Fisher points out that Claire evokes some sympathy in that she is not a full time career person, she is merely volunteering for short periods of time. However, as Fisher aptly points out, Claire is leaving her infant son and her role as full time caregiver strictly to volunteer and this does not seem to justify the fact that she is leaving this young baby. Fisher writes that “the viewer may resent Claire for dabbling in a hobby and blame her for needlessly

shirking her maternal responsibilities” (138). I would argue that the real problem is not whether Claire is volunteering or getting paid for work, the underlying cause is her ambition to do something outside the home in any form that would distract her from the full time care of her family. It is this ambition that will serve to potentially destroy the family.

Claire finds out that the gardens where she works are getting rid of some greenhouses and she has the opportunity to acquire one for their home. As she decides that she wants to take on this new project, Michael encourages her to hire a nanny to help her out around the house so she can spend more time on building the greenhouse. Claire reluctantly agrees to the idea. It is through the position of the nanny that evil comes to the Bartel family. And this is where the story of the Mott’s and Bartel’s again intersect as Mrs. Mott, in the guise of Peyton Flanders, manipulates her way into the position of nanny for the Bartel family.

The greenhouse becomes a symbol of feminine ambition as it is the project to build the greenhouse that left Claire Bartel with the need to bring in a nanny to help care for her children. Later in the film, the greenhouse becomes the instrument in the violent death of Claire’s close friend, Marlene Craven. Marlene is portrayed as a very aggressive and highly successful real estate broker. Marlene is contrasted with Claire throughout the film as Marlene is shown to be much more sexually aggressive in the way she dresses and speaks. Very short mini-skirts, high heels, and heavy make-up are the only outfits Marlene is shown in. Marlene, the symbol of female

aggressiveness, both sexually and professionally, must be punished. It is the symbol of female ambition that destroys Marlene, the greenhouse. Peyton tells Marlene that Claire is in the greenhouse, sending Marlene out to a trap that Peyton had previously set, presumably for Claire. As Marlene opens the door to the greenhouse, the glass roof shatters causing Marlene's death.

The other danger signal sounded out in The Hand that Rocks the Cradle, is the warning to mothers of letting other people care for their children in any capacity. Not only because of the potential for harm, but more importantly and much more insidious, is the idea that the children will become more attached to the temporary care-giver than the mother herself. This is shown through the film while Peyton works her way into the children's lives, manipulating them into primary loyalty to her instead of their mother. She sneaks into the nursery and breastfeeds the infant Joey so that when Claire comes in to nurse him, he no longer wants to nurse. Peyton continually plants seeds of connection with Emma by sharing secrets and defending her on the playground against a bully. As viewers, we certainly notice that now that Claire has a full-time live in nanny, she seems to go out a lot and leave the children. She isn't just working in the backyard; she is running errands and having lunch with friends, leaving the children in the care of Peyton on a regular basis. Fisher quotes New York Times writer Susan Chira as saying, "Many women fear they have somehow relinquished their children. When I put them in day care, I did feel a pull; I'm not the one raising my children" (140). To working mothers everywhere the

familiar tug of leaving their children in the care of someone else is very real. The fear that someone will come into your home and try to kill you and take over your family is very remote and unreal. But the fear that your child will become more attached to another person because you haven't been there enough is a very real and persistent fear for many working mothers. Fisher notes that, "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle serves as a cautionary tale for the modern mother, alerting her to the disasters that transpire if she is not vigilant on the domestic front" (142). Once again, patriarchy is reminding mothers that they are inviting disaster into their home if for even one second they allow their focus to turn away from full time care-giving.

Another film which highlights the danger of maternal ambition is a more recent film, Little Children (2006), which examines the lives of several families raising small children in the suburbs. Two characters in this film, Sarah Pierce (played by Kate Winslet) and Brad Adamson (Patrick Wilson), both married to other people and each with a young child to care for, end up having a steamy affair. What is important to look at, is the motivating forces behind this affair that has threatened to destroy two families. First, Sarah Pierce is a full time stay at home mother, which patriarchy has told us results in a happier family and a happier mother. However, Sarah is not happy and that is because Sarah is ambitious and does not like being a full time mother. To top it off, Sarah was a known active feminist in college and is seen also as an elite academic. Sarah is contrasted with several other stay at home mothers who are shown to be mostly content and happy with their lives. Until Sarah

realizes her true calling, that of wife and mother, she will never be happy. Brad, on the other hand, is a full time stay at home Dad. The problem in this family is that Brad's wife Kathy is a successful documentary film maker and heavily immersed in her job. Brad feels emasculated by his successful wife, having failed the Bar Exam twice, he feels like a failure. Sarah and Brad, both discontent in their lives, start up a friendship, initially because of the bond their two children are forming. This friendship leads them into a full-blown affair. Eventually Sarah and Brad decide to run off together but fate seems to be against them. While Sarah is waiting to rendezvous with Brad at a nearby playground, her daughter Lucy wanders off, scarring Sarah into re-evaluating her role as Lucy's mother. Lucy decides to take Sarah home. Brad also has a fateful change of direction. After he has packed a few things and set out to meet Sarah, he stops and decides to try a skateboarding jump when challenged by some neighborhood kids. He falls, blacks out, and ends up going to the hospital instead of the park. Brad is reverting back to his teenage years, not only in stopping to take part in the skateboarding, but in his wish to leave his family responsibilities behind and run away to take part in a passionate love affair. Brad has not only a change of direction, but also a change of heart as he requests that his wife be called to the hospital and is seen discarding the note he was going to leave his wife explaining his disappearance.

Little Children is yet another example of patriarchy telling mothers how they should live. The implication is that Sarah was not a good mother because of her

feminist beliefs as well as her ambition that kept her from finding contentment as a full time mother. The other message is found in the story of Brad and Kathy, again the implication is that if Kathy would have been a traditional stay at home mother instead of a full time career woman, Brad would have been free to focus on his career, perhaps passing the Bar Exam and having a successful career. Instead, Brad is tempted to look for another life, both in his desire to throw off any semblance of responsibility as exemplified in his skateboarding with the teenagers, as well as in his desire to run off with a girlfriend. Kathy, having taken over all the responsibilities and running of the household, both financially and by telling Brad how to do everything, has stripped Brad of his usefulness in the family.

5.3 Two Battle Fronts

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, patriarchy was threatened on two fronts by feminist inroads, the first being the changing of the family unit and the second being more sexual freedom. The first threat resulted in patriarchy's defense of the traditional family with films showing why the family is better off with a full time mother as care-giver. This is done by either depicting the father as unable to take on the role, or perhaps the father does become a competent parent, in which case it is shown that the mother is not truly happy and the family just does not function as well unless mother is home full time. This is shown in films such as Cheaper By the Dozen, Mr. Mom and Parenthood. Noting the modern day reality that not all women are financially able to give up their jobs and stay home full time, several movies

show that mothers have to at the very least, make adjustments to their careers so that their primary focus can be on the child. Films that exemplify this normally show a mother-surrogate instead of a biological mother, such as Baby Boom, Raising Helen and No Reservations.

Films which show career women not only being highly independent but sexually aggressive and out to destroy the family, also juxtapose these women against either a sanctified mother, such as in Fatal Attraction. The aggressive career woman is set against a part-time female attorney/mother in Disclosure, in this case showing that a mother can be professional so long as it is part-time, and even then it is not the best choice for the family. The final example shows that it is not just putting mothers back into the home full time; it is all about their attitude and beliefs. In Little Children, the full time mother is a feminist and academic and really wishes she could have a career but finds herself in the role of a full time mother and caregiver which drives her to the point of having an affair and almost destroying two families in the process. The over-riding message in these films is that the best case scenario for a family is for the mother to be the primary full time caregiver; anything less than this will have consequences on the family as well as on the mother.

CHAPTER SIX

DADS IN DISTRESS

Looking back at the history of patriarchy and film, we have seen that the 1980s brought about a time of backlash and the movies reflected this. The aim of the 1980s was to prove that fathers could become better mothers than mothers, such as was shown in Kramer vs. Kramer and Mr. Mom. In the 1990s, these fathers learned to express emotion and become kinder and gentler parents, as in films like Kindergarten Cop, Big Daddy, and A Simple Twist of Fate. Combining these traits of masculine strength and feminine nurturance, we have a father in the 21st century who can take over mothering and do a better job than mother herself, as seen in films such as The Pursuit of Happyness, The Pacifier, and Daddy's Little Girls. But, now that Dads can do it all and have it all, it seems the tables are beginning to turn and fathers are beginning to find themselves in the same situation as working mothers, trying to balance work and family. Dads in the 2000s are now charged with keeping up financially, working long hours to provide for the family, while at the same time they are expected to be nurturing and involved as caretakers of their children. Susan Jeffords saw this trend coming early on and wrote that, "The problem all these men confront in their narratives is that they did their jobs too well, at the expense of their

relationships with their families (“Big Switch” 200). Elayne Rapping agrees and points out that:

Unless you have the money and household help of a movie daddy, you end up with the same headaches working women have always had, and precious little time for romping freely in the twilit desert, or wherever. Domestic life, for all its gratifications, is no free ride to Sesame Street. (3)

Again, patriarchy finds itself trying to defend the traditional family by portraying these fathers as very sympathetic characters who are just doing their very best to provide for their families and are constantly being criticized and accused of not being a good father when they are not always available to nurture their children. This is usually augmented with a very unappreciative wife and family that takes this hard working dad for granted. Again, the moral of the story is that if the mother would do a better job of nurturing and raising the children, then the father could concentrate on earning a living. Fathers are finally facing what working mothers have faced for decades, the need to find balance. The movies of the first decade of the 21st century seem to be showing us fathers who just can’t cope and shouldn’t have to; it’s just all too unfair. Ironically, working mothers who have tried to balance a career and a family are demonized and looked down upon; there is certainly no sympathy for the mother in the same situation.

6.1 Regrets and Reformation

Regarding Henry (1991) begins this cycle of films with a prophetic vision of the overworked and overambitious father who comes to realize that what he really wanted was not the high powered job and fast paced life, but instead, what he wants is his family. In the case of Henry Turner, played by Harrison Ford, it takes a life altering near death crisis to make him reevaluate his life. Henry Turner is a corporate lawyer. The movie opens with Henry in court making a closing argument. He is shown defending a malpractice suit against a small hospital being sued by an elderly couple. Immediately after securing a victory for the hospital, Henry barks out a series of directions for his secretary, including telling his wife he won't make it home for dinner. The only interaction we see with his daughter is one where he is scolding her severely and restricting her to her room for spilling grape juice on his piano. Henry Turner is the picture of success living in an expensive apartment with only the best surroundings. Henry is living the life of success and wealth, yet we see from the opening scenes that he is lacking in relationships as we cringe every time he barks his orders or scolds his daughter.

Henry's life changes dramatically when he accidentally interrupts a convenience store robbery in progress and gets shot. Henry survives, but is critically injured. After months of rehabilitation and therapy, Henry is able to resume walking and relearn how to talk and eventually his daughter even teaches him to read. He initially doesn't remember anyone or anything about his life. Yet, with time, he

begins to pick up on pieces of his former life. Many of the things he learns about who he was, he doesn't like. He finds out that he cheated the elderly couple by withholding evidence that would have won the case for them. He found out he was having a long-term affair with a co-worker and that his wife had also had an affair with a friend of his. Henry has become a new person, and this new person doesn't understand the rat race and wants no part of it. In the end, Henry quits his job, takes the evidence to the elderly couple so they can reopen their case, and goes home to his wife.

In a significant conversation, Henry tells his wife, "I don't like my clothes. Maybe they used to be my favorites, but I don't feel comfortable in them anymore." What he is really saying is that he doesn't like the person he used to be, the skin he was in. He goes on to detail other things about his past life he doesn't like, and then he tells his wife that he quit his job and he just wants to come home and be a family. Henry decided that what was really important in life was to take the time to enjoy relationships; he hugs the doorman and holds hands with his wife now. Yet, for Henry, because of the brain damage that he suffered from his injuries, he really could not go back to his old life anyway. This was the best choice for Henry, to slow down and just enjoy who he had become. Unfortunately for Henry, it took a life-altering tragedy to reform him. The clear message of the film is to tell fathers not to wait until it's too late, that they need to reevaluate their lives and how they relate with other people while they still have time.

Regarding Henry, is a foreshadowing of the more recent spate of films that tell men it is time to slow down and reevaluate. Fathers are realizing that being a nurturing full time parent as well as a full time career person is not as easy as they had expected. It took nearly ten years for this type of film to really develop fully into the types of fathering films that are being produced more recently. These newer father films focus on a very hard-working father who is doing his best to provide financially for his family. Because of this, he frequently has to neglect his family, canceling vacations and not making it to important family events, such as is the case in RV and Click, both produced in 2006. Two other films highlight a father who is working hard for his family and at the same time feels unappreciated and lost and is searching for who he really is: Joe Somebody (2002) and The Weather Man (2005). Another film, The Family Man (2001), juxtaposes two possible lives of one man, that of successful, professional Manhattan executive or that of a hard working family man selling tires in New Jersey. Another film offers a man a choice of whether to return to the fast paced world of Manhattan or stay in suburban New Jersey with his family, Jersey Girl (2005).

All of these films continue to highlight that something is wrong with the American family. Dads are overworked, divorces are rampant, and families are falling apart. Without directly pointing towards a source of blame, the implication is still that working or otherwise distracted mothers are the cause. By focusing on dysfunctional and overstressed families, these films invoke the question of what

happened to the cultural iconic family of the 1950s where happiness and contentment seemed to reign supreme. Naturally, the biggest charge is going to fall back on the fact that many mothers are no longer content being full time caregivers. The argument in these films, though unstated, is that these families are suffering because Mom is not home full time caring for and supporting her children and husband. In the case of Regarding Henry, the family was stressed and relationships were crumbling because of the fast-paced lifestyle that this family had chosen. There were no family dinners around the table in the evening as Mom and Dad were both busy pursuing their careers. It took a life-altering crisis to convince Henry that the materialistic lifestyle he had grown so accustomed to was not in the best interest of his family.

The following films feature a father who is overworked along with a wife who is unappreciative, angry and demanding or, as in the case of Joe Somebody and The Weather Man, a bitter divorce has already occurred. Fathers are expected to be nurturing and loving, though nurturing obviously does not come naturally as these fathers struggle to learn everything from how to diaper a baby (Jersey Girl, The Family Man, and Three Men and a Baby) to how to balance the reality of providing for the family financially and spending time with their families (RV, Click, The Weather Man, The Family Man, Jersey Girl). The diaper gags of Mr. Mom and The Pacifier continue to play out in these films. The point is still being reinforced that fathers are not natural nurturers.

6.2 Overworked and Underappreciated

"I'm working my ass off so my family can have a better life than I ever dreamed of having when I was a kid" (Click). This is the theme of the next two films, RV and Click. Both of these films feature the overworked father who is trying desperately to provide the lifestyle for his family that they have demanded of him. Both of these films also feature a family that criticizes the father for working too much, while at the same time demanding that they be able to maintain their rather comfortable lifestyles. In RV the father is so overworked he is finally denigrated to working in a public bathroom stall while in Click the father has to fast forward through many of the events of his life in order to focus his time on his work.

RV (2006), tells the story of Bob Munro, (played by Robin Williams), a hard working family man who is doing his best to continue to provide for his family the opulent lifestyle they seem to be accustomed to living. The opening scene of the movie shows Bob and his wife Jamie putting their young children, Cassie and Carl to bed. The scene is a touching display of a loving family. The film then fast-forwards to a time ten years later when Cassie and Carl are no longer the sweet little loving children that Bob and Jamie tucked into bed at night, and are now full blooded teenagers, disconnected and somewhat out of control. Bob works for a beverage company, Pure Vibe. The implication is that he works hard to please his boss, much to the dismay of his wife, who feels like Bob should stand up to him and not be bullied. Bob had promised to take his family on a long awaited vacation to Hawaii,

but at the last minute Bob's boss demands that Bob prepare and present a presentation in Boulder, Colorado, in order not only to keep his job, but earn a promotion. Bob pleads with his boss to let him take his family on the Hawaiian vacation that has already been scheduled, but his boss tells him that if he doesn't go to Colorado, that an up and coming junior employee and Harvard wonder will take over for him permanently. At this point Bob is left with no choice, and tells his boss that he will change his plans and do the presentation himself. However, now we begin to see just how unappreciated Bob is at home. Bob, being faced with being fired or changing the family vacation plans, has to continue supporting his family and therefore, the audience can surely sympathize that poor Bob really had no choice. Bob is really in a difficult situation as his wife and family are not supportive of him and his job at all; they only take it for granted and like spoiled children, demand their vacation at any cost. Bob comes up with an alternative vacation plan that he hopes will eventually please everyone. He rents a rather large recreational vehicle and tells his family that in the interest of family bonding and spending time together, they are going to go on a camping vacation up to the mountains of Colorado. Bob really gets the sympathy now as we see that he can't even talk to his own wife and explain his difficulty and hope for support.

The typical crazy mishaps that we would expect of a Robin Williams vehicle continue throughout the rest of the show. Bob has never driven an RV before and they don't even get out of their neighborhood without several accidents. Many other

film fathers have pulled comedy out of the diaper gags, but this time, since the kids are teenagers and not babies, the bathroom humor comes from when Bob has to figure out how to unclog the RV's sewage and ends up with Bob being rained on by a shower of sewage. A family that the Munroes meet in the campsite, the Gornicke family, is set up as content and loving, though they are also portrayed as being a little strange in the Monroes estimation. The Gornicke family comes into contact with the Monroes several times throughout the film, usually with the Gornickes just trying to help out the Monroes as best they can. Throughout this entire adventure, Bob has to hide the fact that he is working on the presentation by sneaking out in the middle of the night and balancing his laptop on his knees in the men's bathroom. Many nights Bob gets no sleep at all as he has to work all night and travel all day, never getting a break from either his work or his family. What has life come to for the hard working underappreciated American father? He is literally being drenched in sewage and his office has become a bathroom stall at a campsite.

Eventually the family ends up in Boulder and Bob fakes an illness in order to sneak away and attend the meeting. In the end, Bob gets fired, but not until he has already decided that he no longer wants to work for this company after all. To end things on a nice note, Bob is offered a job with the company that he was making the presentation to. The closing scene shows him with his family and the Goernicke family dancing and singing. The pull of the family wins him over. Ironically, it was his love for his family that kept him working for Pure Vibe in the first place. His

family never tried to understand the difficulties that Bob was facing with work. Bob was clearly doing his best to find that balance between working and providing for his family and spending time with his family. The movie would tell us that his focus on work was wrong and that he needed to shift his priority to his family. What the movie does not tell us is how a father in today's culture can continue to support a family in such a lavish lifestyle without making work a priority.

A great deal of sympathy is created for Bob Monroe in this film. This poor guy is doing everything he can to provide for his family. He works in a stressful job that he doesn't really like. He is relegated to doing his work sitting on a toilet in a campground while balancing his laptop in the middle of the night. His family only demands more and more from him. His children ridicule him. His wife berates him. The look must now turn to Bob's wife, Jamie. Jamie does little to support her husband in his efforts to provide for their family. According to patriarchy, Jamie is not fulfilling her natural role in the family and as hard as Bob might try to do it all, he just can't and the family suffers. Again, the implication is that if Jamie were providing the support from home, both practically in handling all the normal business of the family and emotionally in being supportive of Bob and his job and doing everything to make his life easier, then this family would not be in the state it is in.

Another film that conveys this same message is Click (2006) starring Adam Sandler as Michael Newman, another hard working father who is doing his absolute

best to provide for his family. The immediate picture we have of Michael Newman is that he doesn't seem to have time for his family. The children ask him if he will ever finish their tree house and they tell him that he works too hard. His wife reminds him on the way out the door on his way to work that he has a swim meet for his son, Ben, that afternoon that he must attend. Michael fights Manhattan traffic and finally arrives to work, a little late and much harried. Michael's boss, similar to Bob Monroe's boss in RV, offers him a big promotion if he will take on a new design project for a luxury hotel. Michael tells his boss he'll start on this new project right after the 4th of July weekend, for which he has already promised his family to take them camping. Exactly like Bob, Michael is told that if he doesn't abandon his vacation plans and throw himself completely into this new project right away, he will lose the account. Not only that, but Michael won't be able to make it to the swim meet that afternoon. When Michael finally does make it to the meet, the race is over and he runs and congratulates the winner, thinking it is his son, only to find out it is not his son. The implication is that Michael is so out of touch with his family that he doesn't even recognize his own son. The camera pans over to a shot of his son, Ben, getting support and hugs from his swimming coach, while at the same time Michael's cell phone rings and he is working once again.

Later that evening, when Michael tries to tell his wife about the situation at work, she gets angry at him. Instead of trying to understand that Michael is overworked because he is trying to do his best for his family, she gets upset that he

works so hard. Michael shouts at her, "I'm working my ass off so my family can have a better life than I ever dreamed of having when I was a kid." The true American dream is being lived out in Michael as he works day and night to support his family, only this time the dream is back-firing as Michael tries to model the American work ethic and for this, Michael stands accused of not being a good parent. Once again, a great deal of sympathy is created for this poor father who is just doing everything he can to provide for his family and is criticized from all fronts. His wife asks him if he thinks he will have more time for his family after he gets the promotion, setting up the dichotomy between family and work concerns. Frustrated and tired, Michael goes out to find a universal remote so he can watch some videos from work without opening garage doors and making remote toys fly around the living room. He goes to Bed, Bath & Beyond and meets a salesman named Morty who tells him he has a remote that will control his whole life. Michael quickly gets the hang of the remote and realizes how much more work he can get done by muting and fast-forwarding the dog, freezing his wife when she is angry at him and even fast forwarding through lovemaking so he can get back to working on his big project. Clearly we are supposed to see that Michael's priority are out of order, but in looking from Michael's perspective, what else is he to do? He has been taught the great American ethic that the father's sole job is to provide for the family and provide a life for his children even better than the life his generation had, at least

financially. This is Michael's call in life and it is to this calling that he dedicates his life.

The remote begins to take over and as Michael finds out, the remote has an internal memory that programs itself to Michael's previous requests and preferences. Because of this, Michael is being fast-forwarded through entire years of his life. He finds himself moving forward fourteen months and discovers that he and his wife are in marriage counseling. His next jump forward propels him ten years into the future where he finds out his life has taken a drastic turn. He and his wife Donna are divorced and she has married Ben's former swimming instructor, the one foreshadowed earlier at the swim meet as having a paternal relationship with Ben since his own father was too busy. On top of this Michael has gained an enormous amount of weight, as has Ben.

When Michael starts to argue with his former wife, he is fast-forwarded once again, this time six more years into the future where he finds himself recovering from cancer. He is told his father has died. He rewinds his life to be able to see his last time with his father and is ashamed when he realizes that he was rude and hurtful towards his father. Morty arrives on the scene and tells Michael that he is really an angel, the angel of death. He also tells Michael that the remote is only doing what Michael was doing anyway, fast-forwarding through life. Another seven years are passed over and Michael is at Ben's wedding when he suffers a massive heart attack. At the hospital, Ben tells Michael that he is postponing his honeymoon to take care

of work matters. Michael realizes that Ben is following in his footsteps, strips off all the monitors and tubes connected to his body and chases after Ben to warn him. Michael dies in the street surrounded by his family. Then, Michael wakes up. The twist to the story is that Michael has a second chance to make it right. He finds himself lying across a bed in Bed, Bath & Beyond and believes everything was just a dream, until he goes home and finds the same remote with a note from Morty telling him that he knows he'll do the right thing this time. And with that, Michael throws the remote in the trash can and goes back to his family.

The message is two-fold, fathers need to slow down and enjoy their families, they are overworked and they need to reprioritize and put their families first. The other message is that fathers are now in a no-win situation, they are expected to be the bread-winner and primary financial providers for their families. At the same time, these fathers are also expected to be involved parents, putting their families before all else. Fathers are now in the same boat that working mothers have always been in, trying to find that balance between career and family.

Another message that can be found in these films concerns the fast paced lifestyle in search of a higher standard of living. Michael tells his wife early on that he is only working as hard as he is in order to provide a higher standard of living for his children. The natural direction of this argument is to question whether this pursuit is worth the consequences. Again, this harks back to the accusations towards working mothers that they should learn to get by on one paycheck and stay home

with their families. A familiar and popular argument directed at many working mothers is that they should be willing to live in the smaller house and only own one family car if that affords them the ability to stay at home and raise their children. Never mind the reality that for many working women the paycheck is not to provide a higher standard of living, but to help provide the basic necessities for the family. Now, patriarchy is reinforcing the idea that the pursuit of a higher lifestyle is not worth the sacrifice of the family relationships. Be content with what you have.

6.3 Choices, Choices

The stage has been set forcing fathers into a choice between the love of money and the love of family. Forget the charge that fathers have historically been instilled with the duty of providing financially for their family. Now, fathers are supposed to get their priorities straight and put child-rearing as their number one priority, letting work take second place. Two films exemplify this struggle as their main themes, The Family Man (2001) and Jersey Girl (2005). Both of these films center on a man and his choices whether to pursue a high-powered prestigious career or whether to place family and children as the higher priority, resulting in lower pay and much more modest living circumstances. Interestingly, both of these films would require the father to move out of Manhattan and into suburban New Jersey. Evidently pursuing a career in Manhattan is not conducive to raising a family and being a good father. The archetypal plot device of Dad's learning to diaper is found in both of these films as these fathers struggle to learn how to nurture.

The Family Man (2001) sets up the choices between money and family by juxtaposing two possible life outcomes for Jack Campbell, played by Nicholas Cage. The opening scene of the movie is set in 1987 with Jack at the airport saying goodbye to his college sweetheart, Kate, played by Tea Leoni. Jack is going to London for an internship at Barclays, and Kate is planning to go to law school. But Kate is having second thoughts. She tells Jack, "I choose us" and begs him to stay with her so they can be together. He leaves anyway telling her that one year apart won't change things between them. The film then cuts to thirteen years later, on Christmas Eve, with Jack in a post-coital scene in bed with a woman he has just met the evening before. Obviously, Jack is a player. He is very rich, strolling through his penthouse apartment singing opera. He is very materialistic. Instead of wishing his doorman a Merry Christmas, he instead inquires as to how much money he made in tips this year. Jack works late on Christmas Eve and calls a work meeting for Christmas Day, keeping other men from spending the holidays with their families. Work is certainly Jack's number one priority; in fact, it is all he has in his life. Jack's secretary tells him he has a telephone message from Kate, but Jack decides not to return the call. In a single effort of celebration for the holidays, Jack goes to a nearby convenience store to buy some eggnog when he encounters an angry African-American man trying to cash in a lottery ticket. Jack is able to defuse the situation by offering to buy the ticket from the man himself.

It turns out this man, whose name is “Cash,” is an angel who will be guiding Jack throughout the rest of the movie. The name of “Cash” foreshadows the upcoming dilemma which Jack will face, whether to pursue a lifestyle that provides him with ample amounts of “cash,” or to change his priorities completely and take a menial job in order to focus on raising a family.

Jack goes home and goes to bed, but when he wakes up he is in an alternate life with Kate and two children. He jumps into the family mini-van and drives to his condominium but no one there seems to know him. He is forced to drive back to the house he found himself in earlier, confused and upset that this new life is beneath him—he grimaces at the clothes hanging in his closet, he makes fun of Kate when he finds out she is a pro bono lawyer for a non-profit agency. And naturally, in nearly every film regarding men trying to learn to be fathers, we encounter the diapering scene where Jack can’t seem to figure out what to do to change his son’s diaper and ends up getting peed on. His young daughter sees through him and thinks he is an alien who took over her real Dad’s body and decides to help him out and give him instructions on how to be a Dad. Throughout the experience of trying to figure out this new life, Jack reminds us of how disappointed he is in this suburban lifestyle. He shouts at Kate that he is disappointed with his life. He tries to explain to Kate that he feels like he is living someone else’s life and admits to her that he thought he had everything figured out but now he just doesn’t know. He does gradually adjust to this life in suburbia and seems to be happy, smiling and humming.

Jack's old life suddenly intrudes in the form of his previous boss who shows up at the tire store where Jack now works. Jack is able to convince his old boss to give him a job. Soon he is surprising Kate by showing her an expensive apartment in the heart of Manhattan where he wants to move the family. In an ironic allusion to Citizen Kane and the futility of chasing after riches, Jack tells Kate, "Welcome to Xanadu." Kate is not impressed, she likes her life in New Jersey and she loves the home they have built there. Kate does not want to live in Xanadu. Jack pleads with her and tells her, "I need to do this as a man" and that he wants to "get them back on track." Jack fully understands his role as that of provider. He explains to Kate that New York City is the "center of the universe," while Kate reminds him that they moved away from New York City because they felt it wasn't a good place to raise children. Kate finally relents and tells Jack that if he has to make this move to be happy, then she will support him.

At this point Jack is thrown back into his old life and wakes up in his penthouse alone. He immediately looks up Kate and finds out she is moving to Paris. After he left for London she waited for him but he never came back, so she went on to law school like they had planned and became a successful and powerful attorney. She was now on her way to take another job, this time in Paris, France. Jack follows her to the airport and in a scene reminiscent of the opening scene of the film, he begs her to stay and give him a chance. He describes to her, as he shouts across the airport noise, what their life would be like, he tells her about their children

and their jobs. She stops and listens to him and agrees to stay, at least for coffee. The closing scene shows the two of them sitting at a table talking and laughing.

Interestingly, the writers of The Family Man, David Diamond and David Weissman, explain that they were not trying to pass judgment on one lifestyle over the other, they just wanted to highlight the choices (special features “The Family Man”). Yet, a close examination will reveal that there really is a bias in this film, perhaps so deeply ingrained that even the writers don’t acknowledge this tendency. The bias is clearly tilted towards the family life in suburbia or Jack Campbell would not have been so desperate to stop Kate from going to Paris. Jack was fully aware of the pros and cons of each of his life choices, but by adamantly pursuing his family life in suburban New Jersey, it clearly states the preference, at least for Jack, to live the simple life. By developing a story that clearly shows a very rich and very powerful man, who also believes he is very content and happy with his life, and then juxtaposing that against this same man finding himself working for a tire store and living a middle-class life in suburbia with a wife and two children, a clear distinction is drawn between the choices. The writers are correct in that the Manhattan lifestyle is not really demonized, though Jack forcing people to work on Christmas Day seemed a little oppressive. Jack’s corporate lifestyle is shown in a flattering light, fancy cars, nice restaurants, beautiful penthouse apartment—this lifestyle would seem to be appealing to many people. Yet the homey, warm atmosphere of the New Jersey home filled with love and children is also portrayed as appealing and

comforting. In these instances, the writers are believable when they say they didn't show a bias for one lifestyle over the other. However, the cultural bias is clearly with the home and hearth as sympathy for Jack Campbell, the father, is clearly favored in his tender relationships with his children and wife. The final thrust of the movie has Jack running through traffic, desperate to find Kate and try to create this family that he longs for. Whether the writers are aware of it or not, there is truly a bias towards the family. What comes across as perhaps a clear cut choice between riches and family is yet another way that patriarchy is reminding the family man that the pursuit of money and the opulent lifestyle at the expense of the family will not bring happiness. Yet, fathers are still expected to be the main breadwinner for the family. The system, according to patriarchy, works best when the father provides financially for the family and is able to rely on his wife to take on the full time care of not only the children, but of the household and of him. Life certainly would run more smoothly for these fathers if mom were at home waiting with a home cooked meal at the end of the day.

Another film which places a high-powered father in a position of having to choose between family and career is Jersey Girl (2005), starring Ben Affleck as Ollie Trinke, a music publicist. The opening scene of the movie is set in an elementary school classroom focusing on children who are reading essays out loud about their family. A young girl, Ben's daughter, Gertie, is reading her essay out loud in front of the class when the scene suddenly flashes back to 1994. This is a time when Ollie

Trinke was a high-powered music publicist living in New York City, we are told he is the youngest and most successful publicist ever. This cuts to scenes with Ollie's wife, Gertrude, played by Jennifer Lopez, who is a hard working book editor. The little Gertie tells us in her voice-over narration that "Daddy worked so much that sometimes he didn't see Mommy much," our first indication that Ollie doesn't have his priorities straight. Gertrude gets pregnant and reminds Ollie several times that he has to reprioritize his life now that he has a child on the way. Ollie promises he will do better, but then we see him showing up to childbirth classes so late that the class is over and Gertrude is waiting for him out in the hall. She again tells him he has to slow down and take care of his family. The indication is that Ollie has always worked hard, as a bachelor and as a husband. It is the insistence of his wife that he cut back on his work hours with the upcoming addition of the baby. Ollie agrees to do this, but doesn't seem to have the same commitment as his wife to parenthood. This sets up the film to make the point that parents must shift gears and be willing to make extreme sacrifices with the birth of the first child. For fathers who have been instilled with the work ethic of providing for the family, this shift in priorities is very perplexing.

The crisis occurs in this family as Gertrude dies in childbirth and Ollie is left to care for his little girl. Not wanting to take on the role of fatherhood without his wife by his side, he takes the baby to his father's house and convinces his father to help care for the baby. Ollie's father is sympathetic; having lost his wife previously

and understanding the grieving process that Ollie must go through. After taking thirty days of sick leave, Ollie's father puts his foot down and goes back to work, leaving Ollie no choice but to assume care of baby Gertie.

Ollie tries to juggle both lives, taking care of this little baby and maintaining his life and lifestyle in Manhattan. He takes Gertie to a press conference where the seemingly necessary diaper changing scene takes place. This time Ben tries to convince a female friend of his to do it and she refuses saying she doesn't know how either and gently chides him that diaper changing is not a gender specific activity. He pours an entire bottle of diaper powder over the child, getting it all over his suit as well. At the same time the press conference is spiraling out of control so Ollie goes out on stage and tries to get things back in order. Frustrated with the baby and trying to handle all the stress, Ollie finally explodes and loses his temper shouting at all the reporters.

This is the end for Ollie's life in New York City as he is fired and is told he will never work again in that field. He moves out of Manhattan and into his father's house. In a touching scene, Ollie's father overhears Ollie explaining to baby Gertie that he has been a bad father because he works too much, but he promises her that he will change and be a good father now. This high powered executive is now working for the public works department in New Jersey, cleaning streets and doing other road work as he devotes his life to raising his daughter.

When Gertie is in elementary school, Ollie has an opportunity and a job offer to go back to New York. And now Ollie reaches that moment of clear-cut choice, between the high salaried prestigious New York life, and life in suburban New Jersey with his father and daughter. He tells Gertie they will be moving and that he is accepting the job, but at the last moment as he is rushing back through traffic to try to make it to Gertie's school play, he reassesses his life and decides that being a good father to Gertie is more important than taking the job in New York City. Ollie has made the right choice, he has chosen his family. In the end, Dad still has to be the provider, but in this case, the father is required to take a lesser-paying and far less prestigious job in order to be available to his child. He tells Gertie that "being a father was the only thing that he was really good at," which we know is not completely true as he was extremely successful at his career earlier in the movie.

The focus in this film is clearly on the choice between the hedonistic lifestyle of the big city and the much more mundane family lifestyle of the suburbs. Mother is taken out of the picture early, we know right at that moment that this family will be in crisis without a mother to care for the child. Patriarchy tells us that the best case scenario for the family is the stay at home mother and the breadwinner father, but this is not possible for little Gertie and Ollie. Instead, Ollie needs to focus his priorities not on making money and personal satisfaction, but instead on parenting and raising Gertie. For Ollie this means a large pay cut and a completely different standard of living. The quest for wealth and a higher standard of living now works

against the ideology of the traditional family. In the 1950s, fathers worked full time and were able to provide their family with a solid, middle class, suburban lifestyle. Now, according to these movies, fathers must take on a high pressured work life that compromises their time and energy with their family and/or forces the mother into the workplace. Patriarchy is reinforcing the need for mothers to be at home by showcasing the benefits of scaling back and living frugally, thus allowing for mothers to stay home and for fathers to continue in the role of breadwinner without the incredible stress that is destroying the family.

6.4 Bewildered and Confused Dads

One last result of all the pressure fathers are now facing is cropping up in fathering films which show the father desperately trying to achieve this balance between career and families in their life and find contentment and happiness. Two films which illustrate this are Joe Somebody (2001) and The Weather Man (2005). In both of these films we find a divorced father who is trying to figure out how to live his life after a traumatic divorce. Both of these fathers want to keep their families together but were unsuccessful. They now consider themselves to be failures in life, partly because of their inability to keep their family together. Both of these men are trying to juggle work concerns and figure out what they want to do with the rest of their lives; work just has not brought them the satisfaction that they had hoped for, and now they no longer have the intact family unit to fall back on. Again, the plot device focuses on fathers who work hard to provide for their families.

Joe Somebody (2001) stars Tim Allen as Joe Scheffer, an audio-visual specialist working for a large pharmaceutical company. We know from the opening scenes that Joe feels as if he is invisible and doesn't matter. The first scene shows Joe walking into work when a pretty girl waves, he waves back, only to realize that she was not waving at him but at a female co-worker behind him. Joe eats his lunch alone and his boss doesn't seem to hear anything Joe says to him. During lunch, Joe sees a woman struggling to hang a banner up and goes to her assistance. She asks Joe how he is and his reply is, "I got a divorce," making this the obvious defining statement of Joe's life at that moment. At this point a great deal of sympathy is created for Joe as we see that he works hard and is unappreciated and is obviously very sad and lonely after a traumatic divorce. Joe's boss calls him Joe Shepherd instead of by his real name, Joe Scheffer. He describes Joe to a co-worker by saying "His wife left him, he got passed over for a promotion, and he got slapped in the parking lot—he's a schmuck."

Joe is also a single father. His twelve year old daughter, Natalie, lives with him during the week and spends weekends with her mother and her mother's new boyfriend. Natalie is obviously unhappy with the situation and prefers to just remain with her father. Natalie's mother and boyfriend are portrayed as rather bohemian and eccentric and Natalie is not comfortable being with them. Joe, on the other hand, is shown as a loving and caring father. The crisis point of the movie occurs when Joe is taking Natalie to work with him for "Take Your Daughter to Work Day"

when he has an altercation in the company parking lot. Starke Pharmaceuticals assigns parking spaces based on tenure and Joe has earned the right to park in the “ten year lot.” The parking lot is crowded and just as Joe finds a spot and moves towards it, a speedy SUV cuts him off and darts in. Joe recognizes the man, Mark McKinney, and knows that he is not a ten year employee and thus should not even be in that lot. Joe gets out of his car and confronts Mark and asks him to move his car. Mark laughs at Joe and tells him to get back in his car before he has to embarrass him in front of his daughter by beating him up. Joe doesn’t back down and Mark makes good on his promise. Joe is humiliated and takes Natalie to school instead of to work. Subsequent to this conflict, Joe becomes extremely depressed and leaves Natalie with her mother while he lies on the couch and feels sorry for himself. Natalie continues to call him and pleads to come home. She finally asks him what he is afraid of and he replies, “Disappearing.”

Meanwhile, Meg Harper, the female employee that Joe had helped hang the banner, shows up at Joe’s house as part of her job as a company wellness educator. She is concerned about Joe and wants him to return to work. In frustration she finally asks Joe what it is he wants out of life. After considering her question, he comes up with his answer. He wants a rematch with Mark McKinney. He tells McKinney, “You took something of mine and I want it back. I want a rematch.” From the look on Meg’s face, we realize that Joe doesn’t see the big picture yet and

is only focusing on getting revenge on Mark. Yet, Mark is not the source of his unhappiness and he must realize this before he can move on and find happiness.

In order to fight this rematch, Joe enrolls in martial arts instruction with a former B-grade action adventure movie star played by Jim Belushi. His new purpose and focus in life is to get strong enough to beat up Mark McKinney. When Joe's co-workers hear about the rematch they are excited and Joe suddenly finds himself popular. Joe gets that promotion after all and along with it, the keys to the elite gym as well as his own personal parking space with his name on it. Joe is extremely excited by his new life. Meg, however, sees through it all and seems disappointed in the man Joe is becoming. Joe tells her that as soon as he decided to fight, good things started happening to him.

During this transformation, Joe also makes physical changes, he buys a new suit and tries a new look, along with a new haircut and loads of styling products. Meg tells Joe that she doesn't like the new Joe because it wasn't the real him. He replies that he wasn't getting much positive feedback from the way he was and she explains that he wasn't asking the right people. Throughout this process Joe is searching and trying to find out who he is while his daughter Natalie and friend Meg are trying to tell him that he was a good person just the way he was and doesn't need to change. Natalie and Meg beg Joe not to fight Mark, but Joe persists. The day of the fight, Joe shows up prepared to fight and notices that Mark's hand is trembling, a slight indication that Joe recognizes that Mark is a person dealing with his own fears

and problems. Just as they are getting ready, Joe stops and says that he isn't going to fight, he doesn't need to. Mark does the unexpected and apologizes to Joe. The crowd is booing wanting to see a fight when Meg's former boss, Jeremy, taunts Joe and tells him if he isn't going to fight Mark then he will have to fight him. Joe walks away but Jeremy attacks him from behind. Joe, very effortlessly, turns slightly, and executes a karate chop to Jeremy's neck, sending Jeremy to the ground gasping for air. Now Joe finally knows who he is. With that knowledge in hand, he drives off to find Natalie and Meg and make things right.

The final film describing fatherhood and the difficulties and choices that fathers must make is The Weather Man (2005) again starring Nicholas Cage. In this film two father figures are highlighted, Nicholas's father, Robert Spritzel, played by Michael Caine and David Spritz, played by Cage. Robert Spritzel is a very accomplished writer having earned a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award as a young writer. David is constantly trying to live up to what he believes are his father's expectations. His father comes across as harsh and cold, not really understanding his son or even what he does for a living. The entire film is all about David trying to come to terms with who he is as a person, as a son, and as a father.

Similar to Joe Scheffer, David is separated from his wife, but David is unrealistically hoping for reconciliation. His previous home with his family is frequently contrasted with where he now lives, his family home being projected in warm and comforting tones, a nice suburban home in a nice neighborhood. David

now lives in a luxury style apartment, all steel and glass with cold tones giving off an aura of sterility and loneliness. David yearns for his family but doesn't know how to go about connecting with him. Everything he tries to do seems to backfire on him. At one point he has a brief conversation with his wife outside their home and trying to be playful and perhaps remind her of good times, he tosses a snowball at her. Unfortunately, she turns at the wrong moment and the snowball catches her smack in the face and breaks her glasses. This is typical of David's life.

David is a weatherman for a local television network and doing very well financially. He is disappointed in his work however, feeling much like a trained monkey, all he does is point and smile and read from a script somebody else has written. Several times David tries to learn more about weather forecasting in an effort to make himself feel needed and useful, but he never really gets into it. To top it off, both of his children are having problems of their own. His daughter, Shelley, at twelve years old is overweight and lethargic, and is seen smoking cigarettes in the backyard with a friend. His son, Mike, fifteen years old is just getting out of rehab for using drugs.

David has an equally difficult time trying to connect with his father. Misunderstanding seems to be the pattern of his life in all his relationships. For instance, when he accompanied his father to a doctor's appointment, his father asked him to go buy him a newspaper. David went out and put the necessary coins in the machine, only to have the door slam shut on him before he could get out the paper.

Wanting to please his father he tries to find a way to get more change and goes to a local McDonalds and asks for change, only to be told they don't make change. He looks for the cheapest thing on the menu he can buy so that he can get change and orders a small coffee. The problem is that after tax is added on, there is still not enough change to purchase the newspaper. When Robert comes out of his doctor's appointment he sees David sitting there drinking coffee and having no newspaper in sight, he asks David what happened to the newspaper. Instead of explaining in detail, David just tells him he didn't have enough money, leaving Robert to surmise that David preferred to buy himself a cup of coffee instead of getting the newspaper for Robert.

David is unappreciated as a son and as a father and especially as a weatherman. He is shown nine different times being hit with flying food and objects as he innocently walks down the street. David is in the process of trying to land a job with a national network program, "Hello America." He believes that if he can land this job it would be a fresh beginning for his family and that they could all just pick up and move from Chicago to New York with him and start over. The problem is that David doesn't understand that his wife has no intention of reconciliation or moving to New York with him. After an altercation with his wife he shouts into the phone at her, "You act like Mike's in trouble because I'm interviewing at Hello America," again making the association between his career aspirations and parenting abilities.

The one thing that David begins to feel successful in is his new interest in archery. Initially it was Shelly who expressed an interest in archery and David, trying to win her over, drove her out to an archery range and purchased all the best equipment and a package of lessons for her. She was shown to be totally inept and quit after just the first lesson. Later, after accepting the job in New York City, David again takes up archery and finds great satisfaction in his abilities.

David finally comes to terms with his life. His father passes away but not before giving David what he needed all along, his father's recognition and approval of his vocation. When David told Robert about the upcoming job, Robert said to him, "That's quite the American accomplishment." David finally learns to accept his life for what it is and at the same time he finds out that people have stopped throwing things at him on the street, but perhaps this is because he now carries a bow and arrow slung over his shoulder as he walks through the streets. David, like Joe, is able to move forward past the confusion and the guilt and the shame and to emerge on the other side a better man and a better parent. However, because of the demise of his family, the dream of the traditional family for David is no longer intact.

One last type of fathering film involves shared parenting; three bachelor's take on the task of parenting when a young mother virtually abandons her baby on their doorstep. Three Men and a Baby (1987) followed by Three Men and a Little Lady (1990), illustrates how men, working in concert, can become not only competent, but better mothers than the original mother. Elizabeth G. Traube, in

writing about Three Men and a Baby, argues that these types of films, which place men in mothering positions reflects, “the appropriation of women’s nurturing role by men in mass-cultural fictions as a response to men’s anxieties over their paternal position and the decline of patriarchy” (146). One way of doing this is by establishing the men as maternal, but also by negating any maternal aspects of the mother.

Lucy Fisher writes about the film, Three Men and a Cradle (1985), the French film that was the basis for Three Men and a Baby, “We will see the feminine reduced or repressed in both its erotic and maternal manifestations. As woman shrinks (incredibly) in our estimation, so man expands—to prove that he is truly the nurturant gender” (122). This was accomplished, according to Fisher, in two ways; first, by debasing women sexually by the inclusion of crude sexual jokes as well as men bragging openly about their sexual exploitation of women, secondly, by erasing the maternal in the abandonment of the child by the mother as well as the men’s initial refusal to ask for any maternal help, “Let’s leave the Moms out.” Fisher compares the mother in Three Men and a Baby to Kramer vs. Kramer, she writes, “Like Kramer vs. Kramer, it begins with a woman’s abandoning her child and domestic duties, leaving them to a reluctant man. As the film progresses, however, the man rises to the occasion and is deemed superior to the woman at the job she has vacated” (123).

One last point that Traube raises is that Three Men and a Baby was, “the movie that showed us what fun mothering can be when it’s done by the right men” (145). Men have certainly evolved from Kramer vs. Kramer, though much of the humor is derived from the same types of scenes, however in the case of Three Men and a Baby, there are three father-figures parenting instead of just one. Because of the additional help and resources, these fathers do not have to change their lifestyles very much, if at all. Again, Traube writes that:

In Three Men the baby of the title fits as easily into the upscale professional lives of the playboy heroes as she does into their penthouse playground overlooking Central Park. Men, in this film, no longer choose between family and career. All that they need renounce is their hedonistic singles lifestyle, which in the moralistic atmosphere of the later 1980s they willingly trade for the joys of parental responsibility. (145)

Three Men and a Baby continues to draw on the patriarchal device of portraying men who are able to overcome the severe obstacle of being asked to take on a role that does not come to them naturally, that of a nurturing care-giver. In Three Men and a Baby, this task is made easier because of the support of each of the three men in caring for the baby and later the little girl. The inclusion of the mother in the final moments of Three Men and a Baby and for the entire Three Men and a Little Lady only occurs after the men had worked out their maternal skills and were,

in fact, offering parenting advice to the mother. This differs from earlier competent father films, such as Mr. Mom, in that a new type of family is being portrayed in the Three Men films. In Mr. Mom, the traditional family was the model, though Dad had to take over because of a job loss. Clearly, however, the emphasis was on restoration of the traditional family. In the Three Men films, instead of the parents creating a home environment centered on the children, the baby fits into the environment of these three men.

The opening musical number in Three Men and a Baby offers insight into the three men as the lyrics sing out, “Bad boys, Bad boys; Boys will be boys” while scenes of each of these men saying goodbye to a variety of female friends, the strong implication being that these women have spent the night with the men. The picture then is that these men are players, sleeping with a lot of different women and basically living the life of a high rolling playboy. The first scene which includes dialogue begins with a party being thrown in the bachelor pad penthouse apartment. The movie uses this scene to further develop the story line that defines the lifestyles of three men; Peter Mitchell (Tom Selleck) an architect; Michael Kellam (Steve Guttenberg) a cartoonist, and Jack Holden (Ted Danson) an actor and the actual biological father of the baby that will arrive on their doorstep, Mary.

Patriarchal ideology seems to be battled back and forth throughout the movie with scenes clearly depicting a patriarchal world-view and dialogue which would seem to refute it. For example, during the party, the men retreat to a smoke filled

room to watch sports as they drink and smoke cigars, no women allowed. Rebecca, Peter's girlfriend, interrupts and insists on taking Peter back to the party, obviously taking Peter out of his comfort zone with the men and back into an environment where he is uncomfortable. Comments are made several times throughout the movie indicating that women should be natural caregivers and not men, but this is countered by the women. In one particularly direct scene, Peter asks his girlfriend Rebecca for advice on feeding the baby. Rebecca says, "Why are you asking me?" to which Peter replies, "Because you're a woman." Rebecca quickly snaps back, "Yeah, that doesn't mean I automatically know what to do with babies." In a reverse situation, when Michael is first holding Mary, a neighbor has arrived to deliver a package and asks to hold her. This neighbor offers to change Mary's diaper and Michael refuses the offer and tells her he can do it himself, when it is clear to all that he hasn't got a clue.

It becomes obvious from the first hours with baby Mary that this is going to take a team effort to take care of this baby. Peter runs to the grocery store to buy diapers and food and asks Michael to entertain the baby. Both struggle with their respective jobs while on their own. When Peter returns, he and Michael spend the rest of the day figuring out together how to take care of an infant. It takes both of them to change the diaper. Peter holds her legs up while Michael tries to clean her. Peter makes the comment that he is a professional architect and builds fifty story buildings, so he should be able to figure out how to change a diaper. Yet, when he

finishes with the diaper and picks up the baby, the diaper falls off of her and she pees all over them right at that moment. Then it takes both of them to bathe her in the sink and get her clean, it takes both of them to figure out the bottle and how to feed her. But they do figure it all out.

But for all of these confirmations of fatherhood, it is interesting that Jack never even considers asserting his own parental rights regarding Mary. When the baby's mother, Sylvia, returns and wants to take Mary back to London with her, Jack simply asks her if he is really the father and she tells him that he is. With this knowledge, it would be expected then that Jack would voice his opinion over where Mary would live or at least express his desire to see her, but Jack does none of this. Instead, he quietly hands over the baby to Sylvia. After Sylvia and Mary leave for the airport, all three men are despondent. Jack goes so far as to put a pillow under his shirt and mimic pregnancy.

Finally, the three of them decide to go to the airport and ask Sylvia to stay, but again, Jack is not going to assert his parental rights, he is only going to try to convince Sylvia to make that decision. In the end, Sylvia has already decided she wants to stay and they find her and baby Mary sitting in the hallway outside their apartment. The men tell Sylvia they want Mary to live with them and for a moment she looks confused, but then they assure her that Mary "needs" a full time mother as well and so they want Sylvia to move in also. The final scene shows a baby carriage with an extended handle so that all four, three fathers and a mother, have equal

access to pushing the carriage. The implication is that it truly takes a village to properly care for a child in today's fast paced environment.

At any time, Jack could have pressed for his parental rights, just like Ted Kramer did, but he refused to. Instead, he opted for inclusion. In Three Men and a Little Lady this idea really takes root as Sylvia decides to get married and move with Mary to London. None of the men want them to go and Mary doesn't want to leave her family of three fathers that she has grown up with, but once again, Jack never raises the issue that he also has parental rights. Here, the implication falls back on the ideology that mothers are the natural parents and therefore the father has no natural right to the parenting of the child.

There is no longer a clear division of labor, mothers no longer are the sole nurturers and fathers are now expected to plug in and become nurturers themselves, while at the same time fathers are expected to continue working hard to accomplish the American dream, to provide an even better life for their children than they had. And, once again, the implication is that women are not being sufficiently supportive of the family unit because now they are demanding that men become equal parents and equal care-givers to their children. Over half of the mothers in these films are either absent through death, divorce, or abandonment (Joe Somebody, The Weather Man, Jersey Girl, Three Men and a Baby). Of the remaining three films, none of the mothers are contributing financially to the family. In RV, Bob's wife Jamie is portrayed almost as spoiled as her children. She seems to enjoy spending money and

living the good life and stomps her foot and demands her vacation in Hawaii. On top of that she is so difficult to live with that Bob doesn't even feel he can talk to her and discuss the situation that has occurred at work. In Click, the mother is a bit more sympathetic in that she is showing working hard as a stay at home mother and doing her best to economize. However, she is also critical of Michael when she feels that he is spending too much time on work and not enough time with the family. She is never shown as being supportive or sympathetic to the fact that Michael is working to support his family. In The Family Man, Kate is very sympathetic and appreciative, but though she has the ability to help out financially, she chooses instead to do pro bono work. Each of these women in their own way is either absent, unsupportive, or unwilling to help out. The fathers, on the other hand, are pulling double-duty, working more than full time at their jobs, expressly for the purpose of taking care of their families, and yet are still expected to be full time fathers without much or any support from their families.

These fathering films still include the archetypal scenes which are included to help persuade the audience that fathers are not natural caregivers. The diapering scene is continually drawn on to showcase the ineptitude of fathers. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that men simply prefer not to have to deal with diapers rather than not having the ability to do so. In Jersey Girl, the female co-worker brings this point to a head by declaring that she doesn't know how to diaper simply because she

is female. All of these films create a great deal of sympathy for dad, while at the same time portraying the mothers as angry and demanding.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BUYER BEWARE: CONCLUDING REMARKS

As noted in Chapter One, motion pictures provide an overwhelming source of influence on the lives of many Americans. Academics and writers such as Henry A. Giroux, Annalee R. Ward, James Lull, John Leyden, Joel W. Martin and many others, concur that film not only entertains but provides a method of instructing audiences in how to live. Hegemony plays a huge role in reinforcing the dominant values and institutions of American ideology and motion pictures are a primary avenue for hegemony to function. Movies are the story tellers of today, though certainly not the only story tellers as television, the internet, and other forms of mass media continue to be a dominant influence as well. All of these sources of stories and story telling contribute to discursive transcoding, as defined by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner. Hegemony works by a subtle reinforcement of ideology that occurs by overlapping discourses that are imparting similar messages. Recognizing that film, in particular, carries these messages is imperative so that viewers can learn to watch with discernment and caution. The danger lies in not recognizing the ideology that is embedded in cultural products and thereby allowing various cultural statements to become naturalized and accepted. Family values and the roles of

parenting have been frequent subjects of motion pictures.

This study began by looking at a common form of comedy directed at fathers trying to take on child-care. The ridiculous father film highlights a father who is thrust into caring for children and is seen as totally inept. In films such as Cheaper by the Dozen (2003), The Santa Clause (1994), Are We There Yet? (2005) and Are We Done Yet? (2007), the father is deemed as completely incompetent as a father, these dads, though highly successful in their business and careers, are suddenly found unable to perform even the most menial of household tasks. Sympathy for the father is created by illustrating how men are just not natural care-givers and thus comedy results when a man tries to perform any type of domestic activity. Additionally, patriarchy is reinforced in these films by placing the mother in a situation where it is required for her to stay home as a full time care giver.

The second type of ridiculous father film shows that these fathers can actually become domesticated and take over the role of motherhood. Patriarchy is reinforced in these films by showing that men can indeed become better at mothering than women, such as is seen in Kramer vs. Kramer (1979) and Mr. Mom (1983). In the 1990s these same fathers began to incorporate a kinder, gentler side as seen in Kindergarten Cop (1990), A Simple Twist of Fate (1994), and Big Daddy (1999). In the 2000s, patriarchy is reinforced by showing that fathers have now learned to incorporate both their masculine skills and feminine sides to become the perfect

parents as seen in The Pacifier (2005), The Pursuit of Happyness (2006) and Daddy's Little Girls (2007).

While patriarchy is demonstrating that fathers can be better at mothering, the traditional family is still being reinforced by continually showing that the best option is for the stay at home mother and bread winner father. Parenthood (1989) is a prime example of this philosophy. Defense of the traditional family turns the focus on the denigration of the working mother. One way this is done is to illustrate how a working mother must adjust and try to find a balance between career and family. Three films are used to highlight this approach, Baby Boom (1987), Raising Helen (2004) and No Reservations (2007). All three films feature a single woman who is thrust into motherhood and all three women are required to alter their current career and lifestyle and eventually find a man to form a type of traditional family. Another way the working mother is denigrated is through films which literally attack a working career woman, such as in Fatal Attraction and Disclosure, or even a stay at home mother who is unhappy being a full time caregiver and has ambitions and desires, seen in Little Children (2006).

Now that fathers can do it all they are beginning to feel overworked and unappreciated. This is first seen in Regarding Henry (1991) portraying a high powered lawyer who has to face a life altering crisis before he discovers that what truly makes him happy is being a family man. Other films highlight the overworked father (RV (2006) and Click (2006)) and the unappreciated father (Joe Somebody

(2002) and The Weather Man (2005). Finally, men are also being required to make “the choice” between career and family as seen in The Family Man (2001) and Jersey Girl (2005).

It is important that before we laugh at the incompetent father, we recognize that men deserve the right to be good parents and establish a nurturing relationship with their children. It is important that before we condemn the working mother we recognize the difficult balance that mothers try to maintain. Highlighting the positive characteristics of a traditional family need not come at the expense of the single parent or blended family. The films that laugh at fathers, condemn working mothers, and support the traditional family are not “bad” films that should be avoided, instead, we need to be educated to what we are watching and hearing and thus develop the ability to accept or reject the messages and ideologies that are being imparted in all films and stories that we encounter.

7.1 Afterword: Cheaper by the Dozen Imagined

When asked how she felt about the 2003 film version of Cheaper by the Dozen, Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, daughter of Lillian and Frank Gilbreth and the co-author of the original text, expressed her approval and made the comment, “To anyone, and there’ll be plenty, who say, ‘Why isn’t it based on the book?’ all I can say is let them sit down with a pencil and paper and scratch their head and see what they would do if they were trying to do a contemporary film of that book. I think this is the only possible sensible answer” (Averett 37). And yet, it does not take a

close analysis to determine the 2003 film version actually works against the tenets held by Lillian Gilbreth. My question, then, is why can't a more "sensible answer" be found in producing a remake a Cheaper by the Dozen?

In order for Cheaper by the Dozen to be true to the spirit of the original text, the mother must be able to maintain a career as well as be shown as a competent and loving mother. The father, likewise, must be an equal parent, competent and able in both parenting and his career. The parents must rely on each other and work together to support one another. A re-imagining of the 2003 version could still focus on the comedy by showing the antics and foibles of living in a large family, the everyday comedy of family life is surely a significant source of humor. The father in the original text, as well as in the 1950 film adaptation, is shown to be over-protective of his daughters, accompanying them on dates and chaperoning at high school dances. A great deal of humor was found in these scenes and this would certainly carry-over to a 2003 remake. All of the children, along with Dad, having their tonsils taken out all at once made for much laughter and again, this is yet another scene that could feasibly carry over into a more contemporary version. And, true to every generation, the parent's concerns over youthful tastes in music and style would certainly pass from the previous generation to this one unscathed. This imaginary contemporary version may well show the difficulties of running a household when both parents are employed outside the home. But this time, instead of Kate Baker sacrificing everything in order to be home full time and care for the

family, Kate will continue her career. And this time, instead of Tom not being able to put together a simple meal or run the household, he will be a competent care-giver while he juggles both work and home successfully. And this family will survive; nay thrive, in a world of working mothers and parenting fathers.

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