

Outsourcing Parenthood? How Families Manage Care Assemblages Using Paid Commercial Services

AMBER M. EPP
SUNAINA R. VELAGALETI

An expanding array of available services allow parents to outsource almost any caregiving activity (e.g., nannies, potty training, birthday party planning). Sociologists document a care deficit—resulting from dual-earner households and distance from extended family—coupled with rising consumerism to account for outsourcing. These studies, as well as those in consumer research, clarify outsourcing motivations, but stop short of explaining the differential impacts of outsourcing tensions parents regularly face when assembling care. As such, consumer researchers know little about how parents navigate such tensions when deciding what is acceptable to outsource. Based on depth interviews with 23 families, our analysis uncovers complex care assemblages that are shaped by parenting discourses and tensions of control, intimacy, and substitutability. The resulting framework explains parents' strategies for minimizing outsourcing tensions, reveals processes for (re)assembling different types of care resources, and challenges what is known about the relationship between the market and family life.

There are certain things that you're supposed to have a memory for, and that memory doesn't need to be with a stranger. "Wow, I remember when Mr. Chuck came over and taught me how to ride a bike." [No], that's what Dad does. (Keith Maibach, father)

The market offers an expanding assortment of caregiving services that allow parents to outsource some of their most intimate and iconic parenting activities. In the context of care, outsourcing refers to "the transfer of intimate tasks historically or normatively seen as being performed within

the family and by family members to formal commercial establishments located outside of the family" (Lair 2007, 32–33). Although questions about whether to enroll children in day care historically dominate public and academic debates, examples of outsourcing a broader range of family life proliferate in recent media headlines. Services exist for everything a parent could imagine, including potty training, reading bedtime stories, planning birthday parties, etiquette classes, teaching children how to ride a bike or play catch, helping with school projects, going fishing, and accompanying kids on college tours (Jeffrey 2005; Leider 2009; Zide et al. 2006). Taken together, we refer to these as paid care services.

Once only prevalent among the elite, paid care is now common among middle-class families as well (Hochschild 2003). The US Child Care Services industry generates annual revenues of over \$20 billion (Hoovers 2013), and researchers confirm accelerated growth in this sector (Hochschild 2012; Lair 2007). Tracing the historical context helps account for the rise in paid care and situates families' choices within the broader cultural milieu. Over the last four decades, the United States witnessed a rise in dual-income families, movement to urban areas, geographic dispersion of families, more demanding work life, and dwindling public services (Hochschild 2003, 2012; Urry 2012; US Census 2012). Given the shortage of support from family and the

Amber M. Epp (aepp@bus.wisc.edu) is assistant professor of marketing, School of Business, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Grainger Hall, 975 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53706. Sunaina R. Velagaleti (velagaleti@wisc.edu) is a doctoral student, School of Business, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Grainger Hall, 975 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53706. Correspondence: Amber Epp. The authors thank Stacey Baker, participants at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign research seminar, our reviewers, associate editor, and editor for comments on earlier versions of this article. The authors also thank the participant families for sharing intimate aspects of their lives in the context of this research.

Laura Peracchio served as editor and Eileen Fischer served as associate editor for this article.

Electronically published August 11, 2014

public sector, it is not surprising that the market stepped in to fill the care gap by increasing its offerings. The broad accessibility and range of paid care services blur the lines between family and the market and prompt new questions about what is acceptable to outsource and how families make sense of these sometimes contentious decisions.

To extend prior research, we conducted depth interviews with parents to investigate three primary research questions. First, how do parents make sense of their choices about which care activities are acceptable to outsource? Care activities, whether daily rhythms or sacred rituals, are ubiquitous sites for the expression of love, sacrifice and family identity (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Epp and Price 2008, 2010; Miller 1998; Thompson 1996). Therefore, while outsourcing most activities is possible, we anticipate that not all may be equally up for negotiation. We provide a framework to explain why parents outsource some activities and not others. Explicitly, sense-making about paid care relies on normative cultural discourses and incorporates entrenched needs (e.g., work demands, lack of network). Tensions spark when misalignment occurs between these influences, which leads to our second research question. What tensions emerge when parents reflect on decisions about outsourcing, and how are these tensions managed by families? This question allows us to explain how distinct tensions differentially direct care. Our third research question asks, how do parents justify and revise the *mix* of resources they use in care provision? Through this question, we examine the combination of resources parents use, revealing that parents establish thresholds of care that enable the trade-offs and exceptions made when outsourcing. We also compare resource types on their ability to incite and alleviate tensions. In doing so, we offer a counterpoint to common calls to avoid market resources (Hochschild 2012), demonstrating that sometimes market-provided care delivers a superior solution. We draw on assemblage theories as an analytic tool to conceptualize how parents (re)configure care (DeLanda 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

We begin by reviewing current debates on outsourcing care in the sociological literature. Then we trace the recent entrance of consumer researchers to this discussion and situate our study within this literature. We next outline concepts from assemblage theories relevant to our purposes before describing our methodology, findings, and discussion.

OUTSOURCING DEBATES

While consumer researchers give scant attention to paid care services, there is work in sociology that offers a theoretical foundation. Sociologists point to a convergence of macroforces (e.g., dual-earner households, increased distance from extended family, consumerism) that account for trends in caregiving such as the widely documented care deficit in the home (England 2005; Hochschild 2003, 2012; Misra 2003). More specifically, most parents and extended family caregivers (e.g., aunts, grandmothers) work outside of the home and often are geographically dispersed (Hochschild 2012; Misra 2003; Urry 2012), leaving a void among

familial care providers. The care deficit at home opened the door for new market services that supplement for parental resources, inciting closer scrutiny over the relationship between intimate and economic spheres with two prevailing viewpoints: hostile worlds versus connected lives.

Hostile Worlds

Previous research sets up an oppositional dichotomy between family and the market, sometimes referred to as separate spheres or hostile worlds (England 2005; Zelizer 2002, 2011). This dichotomy is evidenced by separation between the realms of love and money, as well as between sacred and profane (England 2005; Habermas 1962). Family represents love, sacred status, and caring relationships, whereas the market is viewed as cold, profane, and motivated by profit. As such, contact between these hostile worlds is commonly depicted as mutually contaminating (Zelizer 2011). This strict dichotomy paints the market as an intrusion in family life, propagated by time-poor, overworked, and overbooked lifestyles that force families to substitute paid care for family-produced care (Hochschild 2003). Scholars label this intrusion the “commercialization” of intimate life, a term that positions the market as too close to family (Hochschild 2003, 2012; Schor 2004). “In a sense, capitalism isn’t competing with itself, one company against another, but with the family, and particularly with the role of the wife and mother” (Hochschild 2003, 37). Additionally, the hostile worlds dichotomy assumes that the market cannot provide adequate emotion and connection (Misra 2003), as “simple human relationships are hindered, discouraged, and even condemned by rules against getting close, giving gifts, touching, and sharing of one’s self. In all these ways, organization, management, professionalization, and commercialization undermine good care” (Stone 2000, 110–11).

Given its prominence, the dichotomization of hostile worlds seeps into prevailing cultural discourses on parenting, with calls to preserve childhood and keep parenthood separate from the draws of the market. Various child-centered discourses of motherhood, such as intensive mothering where highly involved mothers are solely responsible for all aspects of childrearing (Hays 1996) or slow parenting discourses that advocate “attachment parenting . . . country living, home cooking, deschooling, green everything and an unhurried approach to family life” (Kehily 2014, 40), borrow the imagery of hostile worlds and evoke its principles to advance arguments related to the sacralization and protection of domestic life (Leach 1977; Schor 2004). Child-centered discourses often set standards of being a “good” mother that are out of reach for working mothers and fuel the ongoing debates about whether and how parents should rely on the market.

In line with the hostile worlds dichotomy, romanticized childhood discourses reinforce the importance of parents, rather than others, sharing iconic moments with their children (see Zelizer [1985] for a history of how cultural factors led to the sacralization of childhood). Proponents of a hostile worlds view frame the market as undermining childhood

(Hochschild 2003; Schor 2004) and, in some cases, as predatory and diminishing well-being (Ruskin and Schor 2005). Schor (2004) directs attention to marketing's encroachment on childhood in particular through the commercialization of school systems (e.g., rewards programs, sponsorships, curriculum development) and public and private play spaces. She warns of the negative impacts of commercialization on family life, as children who are overexposed and desensitized to the market may exchange time and lessons from parents with those touted in consumer culture. Similarly, Arlie Hochschild's (2012) exemplary work *The Outsourced Self* documents how families enlist the market in almost every aspect of intimate life. Her perspective of market encroachment emphasizes the depersonalization of family relationships, legitimization of ambivalence toward outsourcing family activities, and amplification of expectations around caregiving such that "our imperfect, homemade versions of life seem to us all the poorer by comparison" (Hochschild 2012, 223). The pervasive idea that sentiment and self-interested calculation divide into separate spheres underlies many of the tensions and apprehensions expressed by parents and the media when confronted with outsourcing care.

Connected Lives

In contrast to the dominant oppositional perspective, some sociologists call into question "the idea that someone is always harmed when care is sold" (England 2005, 396). This alternative view rejects the idea of inherent divisions between family and market realms, and instead advocates for culturally constructed norms that specify more complex relationships between intimacy and paid care (Macdonald 2010; Nelson 2004; Zelizer 2002, 2005). The strongest proponent of this viewpoint is offered in the "connected lives" perspective that contends "people constantly mingle their most intimate relations with economic activities" (Zelizer 2011, 167), with positive outcomes. For example, mixing such activities represents the norm in family life: "couples buy engagement rings, parents pay nannies or childcare workers to attend to their children . . . people in intimate relations regularly pool money, make joint purchases, invest shared funds, organize inheritances, and negotiate divisions of household work" (Zelizer 2011, 177). Further, some in this minority position suggest that the commercialization of intimate life makes the market a more personal and emotional place (Illouz 2007). Collectively, these scholars share the perspective that family and market lives are, and always have been, connected.

The connected lives view also pervades contemporary discourses of parenting, with many conceptions of motherhood, for instance, dismissing the previously held conflicts between mothering and markets (Cook 2013). Examples here include working motherhood discourses where enlistment of commercial services may help alleviate the pressure of idealized and competitive mothering, as in the case of escalating expectations for spectacular children's birthday parties (Clarke 2007). Moreover, intersections between motherhood and material culture acknowledge the central

role of the market in making mothers; that is, ideas about what it takes to be a "good" mother find embodiment in commercial products and services in acquisition of appropriate props that support the mothering project (O'Donohoe et al. 2014; Thomson et al. 2011). A connected lives view does not present these intersections as entirely unproblematic; rather it acknowledges the complexity of essential relations between parenthood and markets.

With regard to this debate, consumer researchers also question the dichotomy between spheres of love and economic self-interest (Thompson 1996). In line with the connected lives perspective, much consumer research suggests that how intimate family relationships and the market are intertwined matters immensely. Several studies provide evidence of different relational configurations between consumers and the market. For instance, in the context of intergenerational asset transfer, family members move between prosaic and indexical accounts in order to negotiate the relationship between intimacy and economic exchange to serve their goals (Bradford 2009). Similarly, our study examines how families and the market coexist and draw upon one another in both conflict and partnership. For instance, our perspective recognizes that, although cultural discourses can introduce tensions, parents can sometimes resolve them by using market resources over other types of resources (e.g., relying on public, village, or family resources may not alleviate control tensions).

Consumer Research on Outsourcing

Despite the market's role as one of the key resources for caregiving, consumer researchers only recently entered the academic debate on outsourcing. Consumer research reveals decision makers' primary motivations for outsourcing care. Mirroring the sociological literature, these studies point to time urgency and a lack of nearby kin as drivers (Bradford and Sullivan 2010; Huff and Cotte 2013b; Thompson 1996). In addition, rising standards produced by the market, through diverse offerings and expertise, cause families to increasingly lean on paid care when parents are unsure of their ability to offer the same level of care internally (Huff and Cotte 2010; Thompson 1996). Finally, these studies also establish that families outsource less significant tasks (e.g., cleaning) to create more quality family time (Thompson 1996).

Along with revealing key motivations, a second overarching theme of consumer research concerns the ambivalence and stress that arises from making outsourcing decisions. Preliminary evidence exposes these decisions as fraught with tension. Not surprisingly, we speculate that cultural discourses that emphasize the hostile worlds perspective likely contribute to parents' feelings of apprehension about outsourcing certain tasks. As evidence, parents express guilt and anxiety over outsourcing certain activities, especially when there is fear of missing milestones or doubt around whether the market can provide the same personalization or intimacy of care (Daly 2001a; Leider 2009). Research reveals, however, mothers' ability to adapt, cope, and make peace with constrained or suboptimal outsourcing

choices, especially as these relate to reconceptualization of motherhood and gendered identity (Huff and Cotte 2013a, 2013b). For example, in one study, families attempted to avoid the stigma of outsourcing day-care provision by establishing more sacred, kin-inspired relationships with service providers (Bradford and Sullivan 2010). Although tensions are clearly present in care decisions, previous studies stop short of highlighting how parents make sense of their outsourcing choices when experiencing these tensions. Our study uncovers the nuanced strategies parents use to manage tensions and demonstrates how these tensions differentially direct care.

OVERVIEW OF ASSEMBLAGE THINKING

In addition to the sociological and consumer research on outsourcing, during the course of our analysis, we found assemblage theories to be a particularly useful analytic lens for understanding our context and a valuable entry point for rethinking outsourcing. Assemblages are commonly defined as entities made up of heterogeneous components with the capacity to interact in contingent and fluid ways (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). We adopt three primary tenets from assemblage theories: contingency, capacities, and relations among components.

First, assemblage theories emphasize the fluid nature of sociomaterial collectivities, allowing for contingent relationships among components and ongoing revision of the assemblage (DeLanda 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Sassen 2006). Prior consumer research confirms that betrayals, shifts in context, and the introduction of new components dislodge existing assemblages (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Epp and Price 2010; Epp, Schau, and Price 2014). By conceptualizing care as an assemblage, we recognize the dynamism of care that happens as parents respond to such shifts and make trade-offs among resources, discarding current care resources and adopting new ones. Various components such as cultural discourses and new care resources may trigger tensions that reconfigure parents' care assemblages. This is consistent with the idea that components continually adapt to new developments (DeLanda 2006; Sellar 2009).

Second, we adopt assemblage theories' attention to capacities—"what [components] are capable of doing when they interact with other social entities" (DeLanda 2006, 7). Capacities offer a fitting construct to explain, in part, why parents integrate some outsourcing resources into their care assemblages while choosing not to integrate others. In particular, consumer researchers demonstrate that low component capacities inhibit inclusion in reassembled family practices when they are disrupted by distance (physical separation of family members), and researchers further establish the possibility of improving capacities to increase a component's chances of being included in an assemblage (Epp et al. 2014). In addition, components exhibit both material and expressive capacities that affect assembly (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Materiality in care assemblages takes multiple forms (Clarke 2007, 2014; Cook 2004; Thomson et al.

2011). Children develop, changing their interactions with and needs for certain resources. Further, the material capacities of particular resources (e.g., nanny log books, birthday party accoutrements) both limit and expand possibilities for inclusion. Similarly, the expressive capacities of care resources (e.g., alignment of emotional tone or philosophy between parents and external care providers) also influence potential integration into care assemblages. We anticipated that our grounded investigation would uncover different processes related to capacities for inclusion and that the concept of improvement in capacities could be useful for our study.

Third, assemblage theories explicitly focus on the relations among components (Bennett 2010; DeLanda 2006). As such, assemblage thinking is useful for understanding complex and dynamic configurations. For example, within the context of care, we recognize that parents do not contemplate each outsourcing decision in isolation. Rather, parents weigh how each choice fits into the greater collectivity of resources enlisted toward caregiving and relates to dominant cultural discourses. According to assemblage theories, the presence or absence of complementary and competing components impacts a resource's capacity for inclusion in an assemblage (Epp and Price 2010; Epp et al. 2014). Examining the mix of resources (rather than each individually) allows us to explain the trade-offs that parents make when determining what to outsource and to account for why some strategies work while others fall short. Thus, we use assemblage theories to explain relationships among our emergent findings and framework.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate how parents (re)assemble care, we used a grounded theory approach. Data collection began with depth interviews with four families of dual-earner parents with young children. Due to necessity and time constraints, these families are likely to outsource a broad range of care activities. Once we developed preliminary themes from within this relatively homogeneous group, we used theoretical sampling to expand our research (Creswell 2006). Specifically, using snowball sampling procedures, participant families helped identify other parents who regularly outsource, resulting in 19 additional families. Variability among families helped us capture the diversity of strategies parents use when making sense of outsourcing decisions (Huberman and Miles 1994), as well as aided in confirming or disconfirming the central constructs in our framework and the conditions under which relationships among these constructs held (Creswell 2006). Participant families varied in their views, activities, and constraints related to outsourcing based on factors such as income, occupation, ethnic background, availability of kin, number and ages of children, work flexibility, and family structure. As urban areas tend to offer greater access to a range of parenting services, we conducted interviews in five different cities (spanning the east and west coasts, the midwest, and south). We continued interviewing participants until we reached theoretical saturation, meaning no new themes emerged in the data (Creswell 2006). In total,

23 families participated in the study. Table 1 provides descriptions of each family, using pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

In-depth interviews allowed families to provide detailed accounts and reflect upon their decisions to outsource. Interviews followed a semistructured guide (McCracken 1988). We asked parents to describe caregiving activities and provide details about how they accomplish these. By doing so, we were able to understand which activities they preferred to handle themselves versus outsource. Our discussion then turned to the particular types of resources families used to accomplish care. A range of services emerged from the interviews (e.g., day care, nannies, meal services, potty training boot camps, birthday planners, transportation services, and homework help). To ensure that we captured families' reactions to the full scope of paid care services, we also presented all parents with examples of actual service offerings and scenarios taken from media coverage (Hochschild 2012). For example, we asked parents about whether they would use commercial service providers to plan birthday parties, teach etiquette classes, take kids on college tours, or enlist a travel nanny, among other service offerings. This conversation covered parents' hesitation and appreciation related to outsourcing, as well as perceived consequences. Tensions and justifications emerged organically as part of the discussion. More importantly, this exchange allowed us to explore parents' thresholds for outsourcing and to determine when and why parents relaxed or breached their care preferences.

Parents participated in interviews together, so we could examine collective sense-making processes. Although we value children's viewpoints and acknowledge their influence in care decisions, we excluded them from the interviews given the potentially sensitive nature of our questions. We conducted the interviews in participants' homes, where experiences of family life, caregiving, and parenting were salient. Duration ranged from 60 to 144 minutes, with the average interview lasting 103 minutes. Interviews were audio- and videotaped.

Consistent with grounded theory procedures, we used an inductive approach to data analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990). A grounded theory approach is iterative in nature and requires continually collecting data, comparing categories, and revising interpretations until the process is understood (Sayre 2001). We conducted both within and across family analysis. Ultimately, we built our grounded framework using the recurrent tensions and strategies that emerged from the data. Six participant families reviewed the findings and framework, serving as member checks. Throughout this process, we moved back and forth between our data and existing theory to reveal points of overlap and departure (Spiggle 1994).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From the data we developed a theoretical framework that answers our first research question, demonstrating how families make sense of choices about which care activities to

outsource. We use the term "care assemblage" to describe the compilation of heterogeneous components involved and the contingent nature of care provision. Figure 1 reveals a process of (re)assembling care where the following components interact to explain parents' outsourcing decisions: (1) tensions, (2) discourses, (3) tension-minimizing strategies, (4) resource capacities, and (5) evolving resource mixes. We provide a brief overview of the conceptual framework here and then offer further detail and evidence in the sections that follow.

Parents' care assemblages constantly evolve, regularly destabilized by changes in circumstances (e.g., parents' employment status, relocating, ages of children, or availability of new services) that prompt the entry of new resources for outsourcing care and reexamination or displacement of existing resources. When parents contemplate outsourcing care activities, three central tensions—control, substitutability, and intimacy—often surface as part of their sense-making process. Our data suggest that which tensions are triggered may depend, in part, on the type of resource in question. More specifically, parents identified four categories of caregiving resources with varying capacities for inciting and relieving experienced tensions: family, village, public, and market. As an example, while the village frequently incites tensions around control, the market is more prone to aggravate tensions around substitutability.

Once tensions emerge, parents must resolve them in order to integrate the new resource into their care assemblage. Just as parents might draw on cultural discourses to seek support for their decisions, tensions can also grow from immersion in cultural discourses that challenge parents' choices. Cultural discourses in line with the hostile worlds view, for example, tend to intensify outsourcing tensions, especially when outsourcing to market resources, whereas discourses in line with the connected lives view may help parents alleviate such tensions. When discourses heighten or fail to resolve outsourcing tensions, parents tend to eliminate the resource from their care assemblage, unless they engage in strategies to minimize tensions. By establishing presence, customizing, reframing, infrequently using, or deconstructing care, parents enhance a resource's capacity for inclusion in the assemblage. That is, resources that parents initially hesitated to enlist could be reinterpreted as suitable once tensions are minimized.

Further, a resource's capacity for inclusion is affected not only by its own properties and the possible deployment of tension-minimizing strategies but also by its relation to other components in the care assemblage. As such, the capacity of any single resource depends on which other resources parents assemble to provide care; parents are not making decisions about these choices in isolation. Thus, to understand why parents outsource an individual activity (e.g., birthday party), we must consider their broader mix of care resources. Parents ask themselves, what else am I outsourcing and what am I still doing myself? Am I doing enough?

To summarize, figure 1 maps a process of (re)assembling care, where consideration of new resources spark tensions

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS

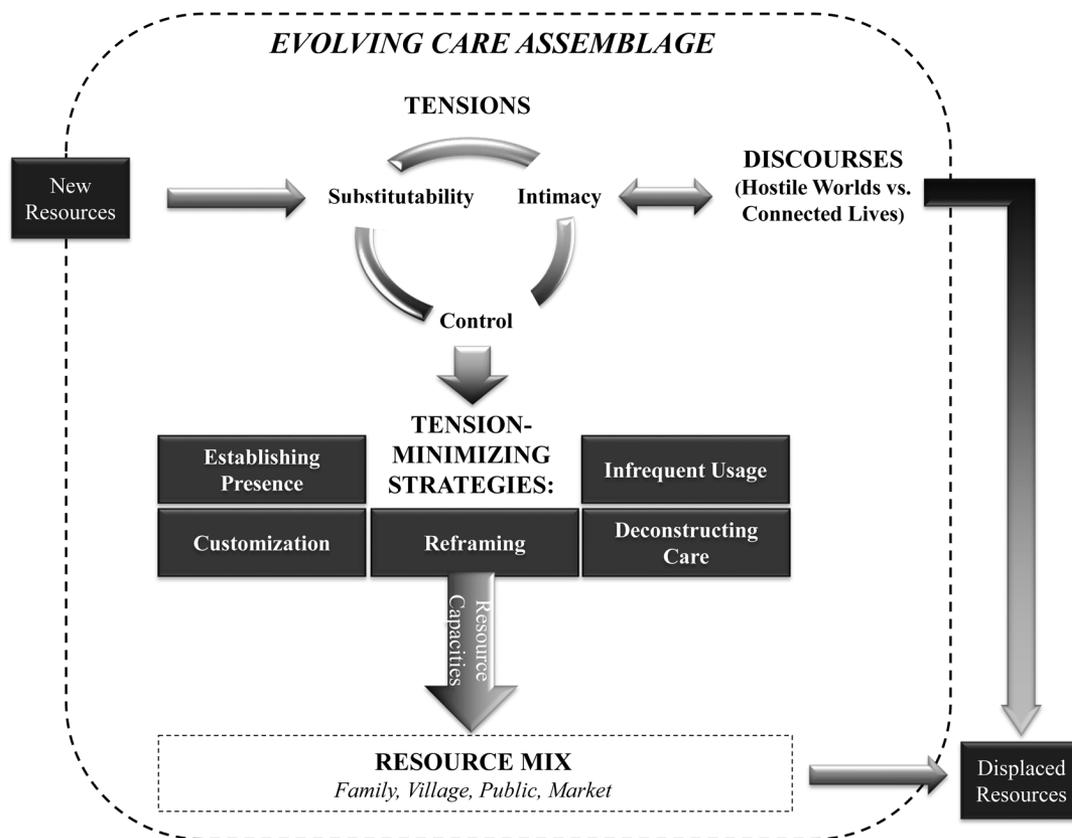
Number	Family name	Family form	Family members (relationship, age, occupation)	Income	Ethnicity	Location	Resource mix
1	Abbott	Dual-earner	Lorna (mother, 29, public health ed.); Casey (father, 29, student teacher); Oakley (son, 2)	40–60k	Caucasian	Midwest (college town)	Day care, babysitting, entertainment, diaper service
2	Neifert	Dual-earner	Allison (mother, 31, CPA); Craig (father, 37, electrical groundsman); Phoebe (daughter, 1)	100–125k	Caucasian	Midwest (college town)	Day care, potty training, swimming lessons (YMCA), extended family
3	Humphrey	Dual-earner	Ann (mother, 43, day-care provider); Brett (father, 42, teacher); Mable (daughter, 7); Jared (son, 4); Megan (daughter, 3)	40–60k	Caucasian	Midwest (college town)	Public (parks and rec classes/activities, library), play dates; babysitting (date nights)
4	Stiller	Dual-earner	Rachel (mother, 38, attorney); Allen (father, 38, consultant); Brad (son, 3); Abrie (daughter, 6)	200k+	Caucasian	Midwest (urban)	Meal service, babysitting, day care, house cleaning, entertainment (park district)
5	Sagasta	Single mom	Sienna (mother, 29, social worker); Aliah (daughter, 6)	60–80k	African American	Midwest (urban)	Entertainment (park district), after school programs, babysitting, transportation (village), extended family
6	Richards	Seeking work	Abbey (mother, 43, unemployed); Clive (father, 38, unemployed); Cam (son, 4); Carson (son, 9 months)	Prefer not to answer	Caucasian	Midwest (urban)	Potty training bootcamp, day care, extended family, village (play dates), birthday party entertainment
7	Wilson	Single mom	Jolene (mother, 32, social worker); Derek (son, 14); Aaron (son, 6)	Prefer not to answer	African American/ Irish	Midwest (urban)	Village (trade lessons, transportation, materials), sports/music lessons, day care
8	Sanders	Dual-earner	Claire (mother, 31, account executive); Jordan (father, 37, corporate training manager); Andrea (daughter, 2)	125–200k	Caucasian	South	Nanny, day care (child care, education, entertainment), meal delivery, potty training boot camp

9	Manning	Dual-earner	Greichen (mother, 44, nonprofit admin.); Ted (father, 46, software engineer); Veronica (daughter, 13); Jeb (son, 16); Van (son, 10)	Prefer not to answer	Chinese/African American	Midwest (urban)	Transportation, babysitters, homework tutor, grocery delivery, after school programs, play group (market)
10	Brown	Dual-earner	Jessica (mother, 31, arts management); Mitch (father, 34, design and production); Miekele (daughter, 10 months)	60–80k	Caucasian	Midwest (urban)	Diaper delivery service, doula, extended family (regular child care), swim/music classes
11	Laitza	Dual-earner	Julie (mother, 30, software eng.); Peter (father, 30, software eng.); Andre (son, 1.5)	200k+	Caucasian	West coast	Day care, babysitting
12	Maibach	Dual-earner	Kendra (mother, 30, general manager); Keith (father, 30, financial analyst); Ben (son, 4)	100–125k	African American	South	Potty training, babysitting (market/village), day care, sports (YMCA)
13	Maletz	Dual-earner	Millie (mother, 38, arts admin.); Jason (father, 41, sales executive); Mark (son, 2)	60–80k	Caucasian	Midwest (urban)	Diaper delivery, day care, babysitting (village), parks district (swimming, crafts), birthday parties, entertainment (play places)
14	Abrey	Dual-earner	Rene (mother, 42, brand designer); Sid (father, 42, special ed teacher); Victoria (daughter, 5)	200k+	Caucasian	West coast	Nanny, preschool, babysitting, public (ballet, swim classes), market (circus school)
15	Kaesar	Dual-earner	Sheila (mother, 33, attorney); Victor (father, 33, engineer); Allie (daughter, 2)	200k+	Indian	South	Nanny, Montessori preschool, babysitting (care.com), extended family (occasional babysitting)
16	Malveaux	Dual-earner	Mona (mother, 37, consultant); Anthony (father, 41, senior recruiter); Geri (daughter, 3); Raimy (son, 1)	100–125k	African American/Caucasian	Midwest (urban)	Nanny, day care, preschool, extended family (babysitting), entertainment (parks district, library)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Number	Family name	Family form	Family members (relationship, age, occupation)	Income	Ethnicity	Location	Resource mix
17	Jentz	Dual-earner	Sophia (mother, 40, director of research); Gabriel (father, 36, realtor); Ignacio (son, 9); Miguel (son, 6); Armando (son, 5)	\$200k+	Caucasian/ Hispanic	Midwest (college town)	Transportation (village), nanny, babysitting (service), homework (after-school program), entertainment (Gymnifinity), on-site day cares (restaurants, clubs), parks and rec (swim lessons, basketball, football)
18	Scott	Dual-earner	Glenda (mother, 35, researcher); Tom (father, 35, security officer); Jim (son, 15); Nate (son, 5)	80–100k	Latino Caucasian	Midwest (urban)	Day care, extended family (babysitting), sports lessons
19	Green	Single-earner	Jill (mother, 36, homemaker); Ralph (father, 37, corporate executive); Jed (son, 11); Rose (daughter, 8); Claire (daughter, 5)	200k+	Caucasian	East coast	Day care (YMCA), babysitting (village), transportation (village), sports lessons
20	Caliz	Single-earner	Stephanie (mother, 44, entertainment executive); Will (father, 46, homemaker); Sam (son, 12); Ian (son, 10)	200k+	Biracial/ Caucasian	East coast	Birthday parties, day care, babysitting (village), entertainment (YMCA)
21	Stewart	Dual-earner	Sandra (mother, 31, project management); Liam (father, 30, marketing manager); Laura (daughter, 2)	200k+	Asian/Caucasian	West coast	Day care (music/art/dance lessons), nanny, babysitting (Sitter City), extended family, potty training
22	Krafton	Dual-earner	Jene (mother, 32, nonprofit marketing director); Bob (father, 33, consultant); Ilene (daughter, 1.5)	125–200k	Caucasian	Midwest (urban)	In-home day care, extended family (transportation, babysitting), park district (swimming/music lessons)
23	Burns	Single mom	Kaia (mother, 30, office assistant); Kevin (son, 1.5)	20–40k	African American	Midwest (urban)	Day care, extended family (babysitting, transportation, doctor appointments), potty training

FIGURE 1
PROCESS OF (RE)ASSEMBLING CARE



in relation to dominant cultural discourses of parenting. Parents then enlist tension-minimizing strategies to increase the capacity of resources to be included in their care assemblages. In addition, the capacity of any individual resource is reliant on the other components of the assemblage. For simplicity, we depict only the typical processes central to our framework, rather than all potential paths. For instance, tension-minimizing strategies may fail, thereby resulting in the displacement, rather than inclusion, of potential resources. Also, shifts in existing resources (e.g., service failure) may spark tensions and force reconsideration of the assemblage. Further, resources may not produce any tensions at all and therefore bypass the process we describe. However, by focusing on tensions, we uncover nuanced family responses that move beyond general recommendations around outsourcing care.

KEY TENSIONS

Our second research question focused on identifying specific tensions families experienced while making outsourcing decisions. With outside providers participating in an in-

creasing number of family activities, three central tensions—control, intimacy, and substitutability—surface as parents strive to retain distinction or primacy from other care providers. Each tension conveys a unique approach to establish this difference—whether it be the direction of care provision (control), protection of connection (intimacy), or assertion of one's role as primary caregiver (substitutability). We view tensions not as mutually exclusive (dominating or categorizing particular families) but rather as triggered by cultural discourses and experiences with particular resources. Thus, families typically experience all of the tensions to varying degrees at different times. For instance, when contemplating whether or not to enlist others for help in planning a child's birthday party, various tensions arise. Isn't it my job as a parent to do this (substitutability)? What if the party planner doesn't do things the way I want them to be done (control)? Shouldn't I be the person who created the excitement and joy on my child's face (intimacy)? Despite struggling with these questions and resulting tensions, parents still outsourced. While previous researchers acknowledge feelings of guilt and ambivalence, tensions have not been the focus of the research. We next outline each of the three tensions.

Control (Directing Care)

Outsourcing does not eliminate parents' desire to direct care provision. Attaining control is not about acquiring it completely but is instead about finding the right amount. Perceptions of too little control aggravate feelings of anxiety and guilt around outsourcing, whereas exercising too much control irritates providers and overwhelms parents. For instance, in reaction to care providers giving an afternoon snack against her instruction, Julie responded:

I'm not crazy about it, but I know that they are doing their job, and I think parents over their head all the time is probably the worst thing that you can do for your child. . . . I'm giving them, I hope, enough freedom not to be the bad mom always asking them ten thousand things and making them just hate my child. (Julie Latza, mother)

Exerting control also can sometimes overwhelm parents, as it distracts them from other commitments. Sheila Kaeser, a self-professed micromanager, described the taxing nature of her approach: "It's like you have a full time job. Then, your other full time job is remote control parenting." Her experience of the control tension manifested in constant texts with her nanny, detailed schedules, nanny cameras, and report requirements: "We ask her [nanny] to fill in a little chart [for feeding, sleeping, diapers, etc.]. . . . It's pretty crazy actually—color coded." Sheila further described how this tension links to competing discourses of motherhood that set up an opposition: "part of it [justification for hiring a nanny] is working mom guilt. So I want Allie to have the closest thing to the childhood that I had, which is my mom stayed at home, but I can't provide that for her because I work . . . that desire to work plus the desire to provide the same childhood that you had conflicts with each other" (Sheila Kaeser, mother). Sheila's actions of controlling each aspect of care in specific detail reflects intensive mothering discourses (Hays 1996), fueled by a hostile worlds view, and heightens tensions especially for working mothers.

The need for control was regularly motivated by a desire for consistency in order to minimize disruption, confusion, or contradiction for a child engaging with multiple care providers. Lorna described the annoyance generated by inconsistencies in etiquette taught by herself and an outside provider:

I want to make sure that the people that I'm exposing him to are people that are going to support the work that we've put in to raising our child—that they're not going to contradict any of those things. And that beep-beep [approach taught by care providers to ask others to move] example was one where I was like, wow, this contradicts like the last three months of work where I've taught him to say excuse me. (Lorna Abbott, mother)

Distrust also fostered tensions around control and often stemmed from the assumed motivations of care providers: "It's not their kid, so they don't have necessarily the natural incentive or motivation to really get into it. Really, it's just

their job" (Victor Kaeser, father). "That baseline, fundamental love is missing, so you have to build a way to reconstruct that same environment even though it's devoid of that familial love" (Sheila Kaeser, mother). This discrepancy in assumed motivations offers evidence of the hostile worlds' discourses researchers commonly lament (Zelizer 2011) and triggers the control tension for many parents.

Intimacy (Protecting Connection)

Despite a willingness to share care provision with others, parents adamantly protect the connection with their children. This drive is partially a product of cultural expectations, which designate the family (not the market) as the center of intimacy from a hostile worlds perspective (England 2005; Zelizer 2011). Emotional affection, shared memories, and in-depth knowledge of personality and preferences foster intimacy: "I know all their quirks. I know their personalities . . . they're my kids . . . I want to know them well" (Mona Malveaux, mother).

Similar to control, this tension is not about complete protection but rather about retaining the right amount, based on a context-dependent assessment made by parents. The very nature of care provision—involving intensely personal tasks like potty training—prevents the complete absence of intimacy. Perceived deficiencies in intimacy reinforce perceptions of market resources as commoditizing, profit-centered, and efficiency-focused businesses. As a result, a certain degree of intimacy between child and provider was appreciated by parents and even viewed as a necessary component of outsourced care. However, as Millie's quote below highlights, the tension of appreciating some degree of intimacy from the market ("that's so nice") but feeling conflicted about it ("I was jealous") is evident: "She [teacher] was saying good-bye, handing him off to me and she said *Bejou* [kiss], and he leaned forward for a kiss and I went oh, oh that's so nice. I was jealous! I was jealous—there's no other word for it" (Millie Maletz, mother). Likewise, demonstrating too much intimacy—such as an especially strong connection to a child—may be viewed as inappropriate or threatening.

Substitutability (Asserting Primacy)

The substitutability tension focuses on asserting primacy as a parent. As ever more activities are being taken over by the market, substitutability heightens as parents ask themselves, "If I could just be substituted by any other adult, then what sets you apart as their parent?" (Casey Abbott, father). Cultural discourses justify the perceived need to outsource day care (9–5) but also assert the retention of iconic imagery of parenthood, reproducing quintessential moments from childhood (Hochschild 2003; Schor 2004). "There are these sort of key milestones in life, but I think it's also about culture . . . it's like the ultimate picture of American family life, right? It's like the dad running behind the bike with the kid" (Lorna Abbott, mother).

These iconic moments are currently what define parent-

hood in the day-care age, so outsourcing activities related to these classic moments makes parents question their competency and abilities as parents. “I wouldn’t use a sleep coach at all. . . . I would also feel that if I had to do that, I must have missed something. I mean, there must be a book I can read or something, or I’m simply missing some human skills . . . or I don’t have enough, you know, empathy to understand my child” (Peter Latza, father). Across families, the substitutability tension was evident for activities parents viewed as their duty or responsibility. As Rachel Stiller explains, “We’ve never had Maria [nanny] take our children to the doctor. . . . We need to be responsible for it and not put someone in charge of making those decisions.” This sense of parental duty also emerges from cultural discourses. Reflecting on her involvement as a classroom parent (for parties and fieldtrips) as well as her feelings about taking her kids to the doctor, Rachel elaborates on why these activities are so important to do herself: “For me, being a working parent . . . I didn’t want to delegate that to others . . . all the other moms that were involved [in the classroom] were stay-at-home moms, and I just felt like it was important to assert myself and be like, ‘I’m a working parent, but I can do this, too.’ . . . For me to be at work and have that mommy guilt, I guess, I’ll be like, oh my God, Abrie’s sick . . . there’s that added pressure” (Rachel Stiller, mother).

Parents struggled with the desire to find care providers that were similar to them (“like me”) while also worrying that the provider would replace them in their children’s memories (“not me”). Devising an optimal solution can be difficult because the tension increases as parents realize that they generally appreciate care providers who mirror their routines, beliefs, and expressions of love. In order to minimize potential threats to a parent’s role, it is preferred that these outside figures facilitate a parent’s caregiving efforts rather than simply replace them, as expressed by Mona Malveaux: “She’s [nanny] not like a replica of me . . . and that’s good too.” Similarly, Sienna Sagasta asserts, “Assist the parent, but don’t overstep your boundaries.”

TENSION-MINIMIZING STRATEGIES

When cultural discourses triggered tensions or fell short of resolving them, parents turned to several emergent strategies for minimizing felt tensions and justifying the use of paid care. In this way, tension-minimizing strategies enabled parents to outsource activities, they otherwise would have insourced, to previously low capacity caregiving resources. This is consistent with how assemblages shift and new components get pulled into them (DeLanda 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Epp et al. 2014). Five different strategies that enhance a resource’s capacity emerged from our data: establishing presence, customization, reframing, infrequent usage, and deconstructing care. Strategies manifest differently, depending on the amplified tension. Table 2 defines each strategy and offers examples of how they are distinctly expressed.

Establishing Presence

This strategy reflects parents’ desire to feel engaged in their children’s care, even when not physically present. The way a parent establishes presence varies depending on whether they are focused on tensions of control, intimacy, or substitutability. When experiencing control tensions, families establish presence through monitoring. Monitoring allows parents to observe and sometimes scrutinize current care provision and provide feedback. Following previous research, if quality care cannot be inspired by attachment and investment, it can be compelled through monitoring and accountability (Macdonald 2010). When discussing her use of nanny cams, Sheila quickly explained, “I would say we start from a place of distrust. You want them to stay in this contained, confined bubble . . . which is your house . . . with cameras in multiple rooms . . . so you can observe . . . at all times what they are doing with your kid. . . . I’m like the omnipresent mom” (Sheila Kaeser, mother). Parents secured presence through texting, video feeds, open-door policies, and reports of class activities and accomplishments. Establishing presence can breed frustration, however, as parents may observe care provision that contradicts their preferences, making the limitations in their ability to control care more apparent.

In contrast, tensions around intimacy alter the purpose of this strategy from monitoring to fostering remote connection. “With Silvia [different nanny] I was constantly texting because she would send me cute stories and pictures and stuff. We were just like laughing back and forth. Or she’d be like, listen to what Allie did just now. I would be laughing and I would send it to Victor and it was like, oh that is hilarious . . . oh Allie, she’s such a monkey” (Sheila Kaeser, mother). The purpose of Sheila’s texts were not to monitor and enforce particular behavior but instead to share in the moments of the day and feel more connected to her daughter’s life and experiences. These actions temper the fear of losing awareness of the moments that typically connect parents to their children.

As opposed to intimacy, fears of substitutability compel parents to block any attempts to establish presence. Heightening awareness to these moments just makes it more palpable for parents that others are experiencing special memories in their place. When children are younger, attempts to avoid presence focused on parents not wanting to know that they were missing milestones (e.g., avoiding the video feeds from day care—Liam Stewart, father). Care providers also sometimes took steps to protect parents from missing milestones. In response to Victor and Sheila’s initial reactions of disappointment to missing their daughter’s milestones, their nanny not only concealed the occurrence of milestones but even prevented them from happening while in her care: “She [nanny] said that [daughter] looked like she was about to start crawling, and then she said she picked her up real quick ’cause she didn’t want her to do it without us there” (Victor Kaeser, father). Consistent with our framework that emphasizes how resources differentially help families minimize tensions, parents’ desire to block is one reason they

TABLE 2

TENSION-MINIMIZING STRATEGIES

Strategy	Definition	Tensions		
		Control (directing care)	Intimacy (protecting connection)	Substitutability (asserting primacy)
Establishing presence	Feeling engaged in their child's care, even when not physically present	<p>Description: Monitoring and/or generating a sense of accountability</p> <p>Example: Sid: When she first started taking ballet lessons, I went for the first three. . . . to make sure it's appropriate. Rene: It's all about first-hand information. Sid: Yeah, I want to meet the teacher. . . . [ensure] she knows my daughter's name. (Abrey, parents)</p>	<p>Description: Fostering remote connection</p> <p>Example: Allison: She [day care] emails me during the day. . . . She'll explain how their day is going, what they're doing. She's so good about sending pictures or text messages, like if they're out at the pool, or if they're doing something fun, or making fun treats. (Allison Neifert, mother)</p>	<p>Description: Preventing remote connection</p> <p>Example: Claire: If I worked from home, I was more hiding. . . . I never feel like I'm present [in daughter's day]. . . . There's no pictures. There's no videos. There's no phone call. There's no written, "hey, she did this for the first time." (Claire Sanders, mother)</p>
Customization	Tailoring care to reflect a family's preferences	<p>Description: Establishing compatible care between family and the others</p> <p>Example: Ann: If we had like someone putting them to bed. . . . you'd want that caregiver to do things the way you do, just to keep it. . . . lay everything out. (Ann Humphrey, mother)</p>	<p>Description: Maintaining primary connection</p> <p>Example: Loma: The story time. . . . like that's ours. That activity belongs to us as a family. . . . It's like bath time. I also wouldn't really have a nanny [do that]. (Lorna Abbott, mother)</p>	<p>Description: Retaining role distinction</p> <p>Example: Rachel: We can't teach her how to Irish dance, but we can teach her how to ride a bike. . . . Our parents taught us, so we'll teach them. (Rachel Stiller, mother)</p>
Reframing	Managing incongruity between a parent's desire and the reality around care provision	<p>Description: Replacing culturally designated with personally defined milestones or sacred moments</p> <p>Example: Mitch: I'm looking forward to the day we can give her peanut butter for the first time. . . . It's just things like that that we have control over. Jessica: The rolling over, and the walking. . . . obviously we want to be there for, but. . . . the firsts that are <i>more important</i> versus less important is like giving her the first solid food. (Brown, parents)</p>	<p>Description: Reclassifying occurrence of milestones from individual to collective experiences</p> <p>Example: Bob: I am going to miss like the first, the very first time she ever does something. But you know what? You are probably going to see it that afternoon or evening when you get home anyway. . . . You get to see it, and it's the first time for you, which is probably, really truly, just as special. (Bob Kratton, father)</p>	<p>Description: Diminishing the significance of seemingly sacred activities when performed by others</p> <p>Example: Ralph: I wouldn't want somebody else. . . . to teach my kids how to ride a bike. Jill: It's good if he [dad] teaches them. . . . But if you didn't want to do it, then it'd be ok, [if Damon's [neighbor] out there teaching Jack. Just send one of ours out there. (Green, parents)</p>

Infrequent usage	Limiting the provision of certain caregiving activities by others	<i>Description:</i> Relaxing preferences around the philosophy and execution of care	<i>Description:</i> Suspending restrictions on others' performance of connective activities	<i>Description:</i> Allowing performance of role defining activities
		<i>Example:</i> Glenda: It [naps] was very important . . . there's definitely a different parenting or sort of child raising philosophies. But . . . I just feel like it's a day, so I'm not really too worried about it. (Glenda Scott, mother)	<i>Example:</i> Ann: On a regular basis it [outsourcing bedtime] would be weird . . . If I have plans, then that doesn't bother me . . . it would be more of an occasion that we have other people do it. (Ann Humphrey, mother)	<i>Example:</i> Sophia: I want my kids to see us when they leave for school. And I feel like same with pickup . . . 'cause I want them to see me. . . . I don't want somebody else to pick them up. On a rare occasion, I'll have people do that. (Sophia Jentz, mother)
Deconstructing care	Pulling apart activities or time into their more significant versus mundane components	<i>Description:</i> Retaining the most effective components of an activity	<i>Description:</i> Retaining the most connective components of an activity or protecting connective time	<i>Description:</i> Retaining the most role-defining components of an activity or times of the day
		<i>Example:</i> Interviewer: Someone can go and buy Christmas/birthday gifts . . . Is that something you would use? Millie: Well, have we picked it out ahead of time? And said this is what we want you to get them . . . Yeah, and then let somebody else do the errands for me, absolutely. (Millie Maletz, mother)	<i>Example:</i> Millie: Ever since he was a baby, mornings were ours for better or for worse . . . Because that was our cuddle time. Not negotiable . . . I didn't want to give it up. Jason: It would be great to have a nanny for that [afternoons] because he has a rough transition from his afternoon nap with us. (Maletz, parents)	<i>Example:</i> Rachel: For their birthday parties, I bake their birthday cakes. I don't buy birthday cake . . . It was a big deal in my family. Like my mom would, you know, it's always in the shape of something . . . She [daughter] wanted a gymnastics party, so we went to Little Gym. But I still made the cake. (Rachel Stiller, mother)

use the market versus village. This outside provider's savvy discretion increased her capacity for inclusion. Further, this example, coupled with those above, illustrates that the tension experienced influences how a particular strategy manifests within a care assemblage.

Customization

Customization centers around tailoring care to reflect a family's preferences by providing direction through overt or more subtle forms of instruction. The most straightforward application of this strategy, also documented in previous literature (Hochschild 2012), occurs when control tensions prompt parents to align providers' actions with their own philosophies. Kendra explains that while her husband Keith would prefer to cook together more as a family, he would consider outsourcing this activity if they could customize it. "Well a personal chef, though, that means that it's cooked to order right there" (Kendra Maibach, mother). "They know your likes, your dislikes. You're not fitting a meal, [you're] having a meal fit your family, so it's personal. . . . If we're on a health kick, it's still gonna be good, but it's going to be healthy" (Keith Maibach, father).

While customization is intuitive for control, how families customize is more complex in the cases of intimacy and substitutability. Parents' intimacy concerns led them to customize in ways that ensure they retain connection with their children. This takes multiple forms. We found evidence of what Macdonald (2010) refers to as "feeling rules," where parents direct providers on how to interact with their children in order to govern and bound their emotional relationships. Use of such feeling rules is common in the case of nannies or day-care providers because children are likely to form strong attachments to these caregivers. Compared with Macdonald's work, examples from our data focused less on preventing threatening attachments with others and more on maintaining parent-child attachment by restricting providers from engaging in particularly connective activities that parents wanted to retain for themselves. Allen mentioned that, although he and his wife trust their nanny Maria, they asked her to avoid engaging in particularly intimate activities with their children. "It [bath time] kind of became my thing . . . that was just kinda like this time I had alone with the baby" (Allen Stiller, father). Notably, Allen's concern was maintaining parent-child intimacy rather than with preventing child-provider intimacy.

Though the customization process looks similar for intimacy and substitutability, we found clear distinctions in the target of customization between these tensions. Rather than protecting connective activities, with substitutability parents customized to maintain role distinction. For Sienna, discipline is solely a parental activity that she withholds from outsiders:

I understand that there has to be rules and reinforcement in place. I'm fine with rules . . . [But] discipline is supposed to be at home. . . . I wouldn't want anyone else to do [it] . . . I let the teachers know. . . . If Aliah is not listenin'

. . . you contact me. That is something that I tell them up front. . . . The teacher has my desk number . . . my cell phone number . . . my pager number, so no matter where I am, the teacher can contact me. And she knows this. (Sienna Sagasta, mother)

Sienna customizes service by giving instruction about which activities are purely her own as a parent. This highlights the distinction across tensions for how customization is carried out, where substitutability tensions focus on retaining role distinction as opposed to maintaining primary connection (intimacy) or directing care in ways compatible with parents' approaches (control).

Reframing

Reframing involves managing incongruity between a parent's desire and the reality around care provision. In many cases, parents accepted this disparity. When concession was not an option though, as with sacred or role defining activities like milestones, parents engaged in reframing to bring reality closer to what they needed it to be. This strategy is conveyed in previous literature through general recommendations to reframe service providers as family or kin (Bradford and Sullivan 2010). We demonstrate, however, that reframing takes different forms depending on the tension of prominence. While Bradford and Sullivan's (2010) approach to reframing would alleviate tensions around control, it may actually aggravate those around intimacy and substitutability. Our findings therefore build upon prior literature, revealing how different tensions engender different approaches and effects.

In the case of substitutability, reframing prevents the market from co-opting sacred, role-defining activities by diminishing the significance of these tasks when performed by those outside of the family. For Sienna Sagasta, having dinner at home was central to her sense of parental identity. When she had to work a later shift and her daughter's afterschool program started offering substantive food at 5 p.m., Sienna's fear of substitutability was heightened:

One evening I went and picked her up, and she had actually had some rice, and some bourbon chicken, and some stir-fried vegetables . . . which I feel bad, because kids are supposed to be havin' dinner at home with their parents . . . they [program directors] just wanna make sure the kids have a healthy snack. . . . To me, dinner is something that happens at home. It's somethin' that a parent is supposed to do. . . . I wouldn't want her to have dinner outside the home. . . . I guess [it's] from my upbringing. We never . . . with my Mom, we were not allowed to eat . . . from anyone's house. That was somethin' that, you come home to eat. (Sienna Sagasta, mother)

To minimize her fear of losing this activity to the market, she diminished the program's eating event, insisting that what they offered was not dinner but instead a snack, even though the time and content mirrors that of mealtime. Bradford and Sullivan's (2010) recommendation may backfire

in this case because reframing the care providers as family would only intensify the feeling that the roles between parents and market are not distinct.

Control tensions directed families to reframe by redefining what activities count as a milestone from culturally dictated to personally defined moments. This strategy ensured that parents did not miss what they considered to be the important “firsts” in life. Unpredictable developmental milestones (e.g., first steps) became less significant than ones for which parents could ensure their presence. “It’s like what’s engrained in our heads. Riding a bike is one. First day of kindergarten is one . . . learning how to drive a car. I would say for us another big milestone is going to be her first soccer game or her first piano recital—whatever she decides to do. Like the first time she does it in public is going to be a milestone” (Sheila Kaeser, mother). While cultural norms make it difficult to erase the significance of developmental firsts, parents can reclassify traditionally mundane activities as noteworthy by injecting them with feelings of connection and significance. Here our work departs from previous theories of care that focus on reproducing iconic childhood memories (Hochschild 2012; Macdonald 2010; Schor 2004; Thompson 1996). Instead, parents are elevating the importance of unique family milestones.

In contrast, for those managing intimacy tensions, more traditionally designated activities (e.g., developmental firsts) remain recognized as milestones, but parents reclassify the actual moment of significance. More specifically, the “real first” occurs when families experience the activity together, rather than when the child actually performs it for the first time. “It’ll be a first time for us when *we* see her walk . . . that’ll be *our* first. We’ll count that one, not the other one” (Allison Neifert, mother). Similarly, when enlisting a coach to teach a child to ride a bike, the significant moment is not the first time she rides a bike with the coach, but the first time she rides her bike with her father. In this way, the interpretation of the milestone changes—the moment of significance is reclassified—from an individual accomplishment to a collective experience.

In addition to activities, parents also reframe what counts as sacred time. Parents redefine times traditionally identified as family time (Daly 2001b; Epp and Price 2011), as unimportant or mundane, allowing them to release activities occurring during that time to the market. For example, although after school and early evening are traditionally considered family time (Daly 2001b), Gretchen and Ted Manning reframed family time away from transporting kids to afterschool and evening activities, increasing the capacity of this activity to be outsourced and instead located family time in game playing on Friday nights:

Gretchen: Nobody gets off work at 2:30, right? . . . So that 2:30 to 6:00 time, if the kids are younger than 12 or 13 . . . you need to figure out who’s going to take care of them. So there are after school programs [Children’s Rendezvous and Future World]. . . . The afternoon pickup person changes depending on what people’s availability is . . . she [provider] picks up [son] from the elementary school, walks with him

to the after school program and picks up an envelope with \$10.

Interviewer: What does it look like between 7 and bedtime?

Gretchen: Usually everybody doing their own thing.

Ted: Our big game nights are Friday . . . which is actually quite nice. (Manning)

Reframing enables parents to control what activities and times really matter by allowing them to personally define what counts in opposition to the culturally dictated moments like the 6 o’clock crash when families come together in the evening (Larson and Richards 1994). It also allows for a more emergent view of which discourses and resources are integrated into the family’s care assemblage, as the Mannings disregard family time discourses in favor of working parent discourses (“I’m probably the third generation of working women”—Gretchen Manning, mother), as well as shuffle different resources in and out to meet their needs.

Infrequent Usage

For parents in our study, limits to outsourcing were commonly defined by how often an activity was outsourced, rather than by the absolute restriction of outsiders performing particular tasks. Mostly, it is unrealistic to completely protect aspects of care, as unplanned circumstances require that outsiders sometimes perform typically insourced tasks. As long as parents maintain primary ownership, however, infrequent breaches are typically palatable.

Infrequency brings a sense of diminished impact or consequence and offers the advantage of non-threatening exposure to diverse role models or perspectives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, parents occasionally relaxed their direction of care (control); anecdotal examples abound of parents who overlook when their kids eat junk food or stay up late when in someone else’s care. However, even for the most intimate activities, parents suspend restrictions. Mona reveals that occasional breaches are acceptable. “Those are like family bonding times to me. Like meals, bath . . . if that [outsourcing] had to be done on occasion to meet some other needs, I would be okay with that, but I wouldn’t wanna do it every day” (Mona Malveaux, mother).

The same philosophy follows with substitutability. Parents stave off fears of replacement by performing role-defining tasks a majority of the time, with sporadic intrusions not disrupting parental identity. The Stillers sometimes use a meal delivery service to prepare family dinner, despite the task’s iconic associations with the mother role (Larson, Branscomb, and Wiley 2006).

Rachel: We have used a meal service . . . but we don’t do it all the time.

Allen: We’re vegetarian. You get a . . . menu on the week before and select which ones [meals] you want.

Rachel: It’s like having a sous chef essentially. Everything’s stocked . . . ready to go.

Allen: One of the reasons actually I've not been doing it [meal delivery] is that you've been working so much . . . if we were sitting down for dinner it'd be one thing. (Stiller)

Allen mentioned that they cook four to five times per week ("ravioli or tortellini," "beans and rice," or "veggie burgers"), so occasionally using a meal service does not encroach on mealtime. At first glance, it seems strange that the Stillers outsource to a meal service only when mom is actually home and able to cook. After all, previous literature suggests that parents typically outsource when they are away and need the market to step in and take over activities (Hochschild 2003; Thompson 1996). Occasional use may be more in line with the idea of leveraging outside resources in order to ensure quality family time when present (Thompson 1996). In this way, using paid care was viewed as a special occasion, not a threat.

Deconstructing Care

Parents use deconstructing care as a creative strategy that allows them to outsource pieces of an activity, rather than sacrificing the whole. Deconstructing care refers to pulling apart activities or time into their more significant versus ordinary components, insourcing the former and releasing the latter to outside providers. What parents defined as significant, and therefore retained, depends on the tension highlighted (see table 2). Although this strategy relies on cultural discourses to define particular times and activities as sacred (Daly 1996), deconstructing care for the purposes of outsourcing emerged in our study.

Deconstructing time involves designating times of day or times together as sacred, protecting and insourcing activities that fall within that time, while releasing those outside of it. As previously discussed, the literature highlights family time in the evening as sacred, and those findings were generally supported by our study. In our data, however, we found that families shifted activities in and out of this time to allow for outsourcing. Activities shifted into this time were viewed as more substantive, while those shifted out of this protected time became less significant. Parents enact this strategy both explicitly and implicitly. For Casey and Lorna, watching their son get a haircut was spontaneously thrust into the sacred category when it fell into their family time together.

I wouldn't have been that upset if I wasn't there for his first haircut. But, he's gone to the barber with me . . . and then he asks "can I get a haircut?" . . . We hadn't even really planned on it . . . the act of getting a first haircut wouldn't have otherwise been important to me. So, the interaction with him made it meaningful for me. (Casey Abbott, father)

While the caregiving literature emphasizes how mothers actively engineer family time to ensure that activities they consider sacred (e.g., bath time) happen during family time (e.g., in the evening; Macdonald 2010), researchers have overlooked the spontaneous promotion of mundane activities to sacred status that we find in our data. Thus, mundane

activities too can be contaminated by sacred times (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). The opposite principle could work as well, as parents could shift activities out of family time in order to diminish tensions and increase resource capacities for outsourcing.

In addition to time, parents also deconstruct activities to enable outsourcing. With intimacy, parents focus on retaining the most connective aspect of the activity, while substitutability would focus on role-defining aspects and control on significant components. For example, Jolene deconstructed bedtime stories into the practical task of reading—which she suggested anyone could do, so she released it to outside others—and the more intimate aspect of cuddling in bed together, which only she could do.

Anybody can tell a story to a kid—it's not so personal. The intimate moment of snuggling in bed and lying together and reading a book . . . talking in bed is a big part of it . . . I said, "well what do you wanna talk about?" He's like, you know, feelings and things, [laughs] so that stuff is more—I gotta do that. . . . But like just sitting in a chair by the bed? Any babysitter can do books. (Jolene Wilson, mother)

Similarly, parents deconstruct activities in ways that allow them to hold on to the aspects that most clearly represent their role as a parent (substitutability). In Stephanie and Will's discussion of their decision to outsource aspects of their son's birthday party, they deconstructed the activity into entertainment and food provision and reflected on different choices about outsourcing each:

Stephanie: The gym teacher. His name is Mr. K. . . . We've actually hired him now, what? Three times I think. We had a winter Mr. K. party for Ian's birthday once.

Will: Right, which we did in . . . the local Y. They have sort of a rumpus room activity area that you can rent out . . . And also we used to do Big Jake . . .

Stephanie: He would come in and sing to the kids . . .

Will: So it kinda takes a big entertainment piece out of our hands . . . And then there's usually the food piece . . .

Stephanie: I can't even think of the last time I served a cake I didn't make myself. . . . I'm probably skewed in my cooking efforts toward baking because so much of it is like this defensive creative loving gesture that I will give you something delicious and safe.

Will: The nephew Jay . . . wants your vanilla pound cake . . . He requests, at his birthday, that his Aunt makes his birthday cake. Not sure how his Mom feels about that. (Caliz)

In this example, and consistent with prior literature (Clarke 2007), both Stephanie and Will identify baking the birthday cake as a material embodiment of the mother's role in the birthday party context. They therefore retain this activity. Conversely, repeated outsourcing of entertainment seemed inconsequential, as it was not closely associated with their parental roles.

Whereas parents were previously forced to decide between assuming or releasing entire activities, this strategy demonstrates an imaginative way that parents outsource certain elements while still retaining the meaning of the activity. Deconstruction therefore bypasses cultural constraints that prompt parents to hold onto activities like bedtime stories or birthday parties and provides an alternative to the all-or-nothing choice to outsource.

EVOLVING RESOURCE MIX

Our findings thus far explain how parents make sense of decision-making at the individual activity level (e.g., birthday parties), but in line with our third research question about how parents justify and revise their care assemblages, we find that families actually contemplate individual choices in relation to the broader mix of resources parents use to provide care (see fig. 1). A family's resource mix is the result of intentional as well as emergent relations among assemblage components as parents seek both diversity and consistency, efficiencies and synergies, and manage felt tensions. Families negotiate trade-offs in arriving at what is viewed as the best mix of care resources for the moment and further expand or retract these combinations as they balance changing needs with experienced tensions. Characteristics of the resource mix include composition, formation, and revision.

Composition

Parents' resource mixes regularly blend multiple, diverse types of resources in partnership in an attempt to provide care. In line with a connected lives view, parents maintain differential social ties and operating rules (e.g., monetary payments vs. reciprocity) across resource types that help preserve boundaries while allowing for crossover between economic and intimate realms (Zelizer 2005). Our data revealed four types of caregiving resources: family, village, public, and market. Family typically included those related by blood, marriage, or commitment. As family becomes increasingly inaccessible due to mobility and geographic dispersion, the village is an attempt to establish a more organic and less formalized community of care, grounded in reciprocity and composed of neighbors, friends, and/or other networks of parents. The term "village" was both emergent in our data and is commonly used in popular press and academic circles (Hochschild 2012). Public resources are typically free or inexpensive government-sponsored, nonprofit, or community-based organizations (e.g., parks and recreation, university-affiliated services). Finally, the market is an expanding and diverse resource made up of formal commercial establishments that offer care for a fee. As indicated in table 1, in almost all cases, parents' resource mixes incorporated elements from across categories, assembling together the family, village, public, and market as needed.

When considering how to accomplish care, parents find both advantages and drawbacks to using each type of re-

source that shapes its capacity for inclusion in the care assemblage; resources vary in their abilities to alleviate tensions. For instance, the market may quiet certain tensions (e.g., control) that are elevated in the village, and tensions that may be less problematic in the family (e.g., intimacy) might emerge in the market. Additionally, parents may choose one type of resource over others depending on whether, or to what extent, these resources facilitate tension-minimizing strategies. In short, tensions affect the particular mix of resources parents choose for care provision. Table 3 summarizes the emergent relationships between tensions and resource types and provides illustrative data.

As stated earlier, heightened control tensions motivate families to seek consistent and compatible care provision across multiple resources, ensuring alignment with their family values and identity and facilitating smoother transitions across providers. The Richards family's day care was unable to support their son's potty training boot camp regime, emphasizing the importance of examining relations among assemblage components.

With the potty boot camp, what it says is, don't confuse your child. Don't . . . put 'em in Pull-ups, or diapers, and also underwear. Like, it's all or nothing. And . . . they [day-care providers] were saying he's not ready. And then Cam would go back in the Pull-ups, and he would pee in them. . . . That just destroyed everything. (Abby Richards, mother)

While more synergistic partnerships among care givers can be fostered through customization, this strategy is sometimes difficult for parents to execute with family, village, or public resources. Parents avoided directing care when using public resources because they felt it was unreasonable to expect such a high degree of customization from free resources. The complexity of long-term relationships and strong desire to maintain harmony in the family and village make censorship of certain activities or tailoring of interactions difficult to communicate and enforce.

Distinct from family and village resources, the market has fewer relational strings attached (Marcoux 2009). The paid or contractual nature of the market enabled parents to more comfortably instill certain limits or express direction, feeling justified in a fee-for-service arrangement. These findings run counter to the conclusion that family always should be the preferred resource or that a return to the village offers an ideal solution to the care deficit at home (Hochschild 2012). Instead, the market often can more effectively resolve control tensions due to its for-hire, contractual nature.

When contemplating which types of resources to assemble, parents found family to be the least threatening when it came to intimacy and substitutability. Intimacy was viewed as an inherent and natural aspect of family relationships. Family members' roles are also clearly defined culturally; mother, grandmother, and aunt are relatively unambiguous. As such, parents expressed that no matter how much family members love their kids or perform primary caregiving tasks, they do not fear replacement. Recall Sienna, who articulated concerns about the market taking over

TABLE 3
TENSIONS BY RESOURCE TYPE

Resource type	Definition and exchange currency	Tensions		
		Control (directing care)	Intimacy (protecting connection)	Substitutability (asserting primacy)
Family	Related by blood, marriage, or commitment (e.g., grandparent, aunt); obligation/love	<p><i>High tension:</i> Heightened based on perceived relational repercussions of directing care</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Mona: That [giving instructions] was a little trickier. . . . They're family . . . it's different when you've hired someone to be that role . . . if your parents watch her, they're her caregiver, but we have a whole relationship with them . . . we're not paying them . . . it would compromise the rest of the relationship potentially if it became a conflict over the caregiving. (Mona Malveaux, mother)</p>	<p><i>Low tension:</i> Alleviated because intimacy is expected among family members</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Julie: I feel him spending time with me or him spending time with my mom or my sister is the same type of quality time . . . it's not like some different person, it's family . . . I would put that in the same bucket. For me, it's the same type of interaction that he would get, that he wouldn't get with someone from the outside. (Julie Latza, mother)</p>	<p><i>Low tension:</i> Alleviated because family members typically adhere to culturally prescribed roles</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Glenda: If we were to say get the nanny that . . . reads the book . . . I think that's bad for family . . . it gets in the way of our relationship with our kids . . . But if you were to say to me, my mom's going to live with me . . . be that extra third person, that to me is different . . . She might read books . . . But because it's my mom . . . you're building that relationship with one of the family, and yeah, maybe you may favor Mom over me or whatever, but I can handle that. (Glenda Scott, mother)</p>
Village	Organic and informal community of care (e.g., neighbors, friends, other parents); reciprocity	<p><i>High tension:</i> Heightened based on feelings of indebtedness and perceived relational repercussions of directing care</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Jill: I don't want to be high maintenance. I want it to be as easy as possible for them [neighbors] . . . I'm not gonna say no, they can't watch TV 'cause they're doing me the favor of watching my kids, so I'm not gonna dictate what they can and can't do. <i>Ralph:</i> Basically all our rules go out the window when our kids go to somebody else's house. And we just say don't be needy. (Green, parents)</p>	<p><i>Low tension:</i> Alleviated because of potential for long-term, trusting relationships</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Stephanie: Across the street, there's a family of four, and the two girls have been babysitters for us . . . [We were] reminiscing about the fact that Jenny [now a high school senior], when we brought Sam into the world, he loved her. . . . When he was . . . little, who would sit down on the floor and play with him and teach him his letters? It was Jenny . . . these are families we've grown to know and trust. (Stephanie Caliz, mother)</p>	<p><i>High tension:</i> Heightened based on potential role ambiguity</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Ralph: I wouldn't want somebody else in the village to teach my kids how to ride a bike. <i>Jill:</i> They're [kids] gonna grow up and say "oh, well my neighbor taught me how to ride a bike" . . . it's part of them having that memory. (Ralph Green, father)</p>

Public	Formal government, non-profit or community-based organizations; monetary/free	<i>Moderate tension:</i> Often take on connective tasks, but little intimacy is expected due to assumed institutional regulation	<i>Moderate tension:</i> Often engage in primary parenting tasks/times, but take on differentiating prescribed roles (e.g., teacher, coach)
	<p><i>Example:</i> Alison: They [YMCA] had swimming lessons . . . It's a little cheaper . . . they don't really learn a whole lot. . . . It would have been nice to learn, as parents, more like the first aid part . . .</p> <p>Interviewer: What about your ability to customize?</p> <p>Alison: Mm, no, hu-uh. (Alison Neifert, mother)</p>	<p><i>Example:</i> Jolene: I don't want him to be in an institution for so long . . . It's just not nurturing . . . to be in school from 8:00 to 4:30. He's in an afterschool program. . . . My family [growing up] was around, and after school, you're with family. You're not with [institutions] . . . if you need a hug, can you go get a hug? (Jolene Wilson, mother)</p>	<p><i>Example:</i> Gretchen: The park district program emphasizes sports . . . they'll let kids do their homework first and then do different sports. . . . So those are taken care of so by the time we pick up the kids at probably between 5 and 6. (Gretchen Manning, mother)</p>
Market	Formal commercial establishments that offer care for a fee (e.g., day care, party planners); monetary	<i>Moderate tension:</i> Intimacy is not expected from the market, but some amount is desired	<i>High tension:</i> Heightened because offerings can compete, in terms of activities/time, with primary caretaker role
	<p><i>Example:</i> Alison: We wanted Phoebe to not have a pacifier past 5 months, so we talked to Tara our day-care provider. . . . She just was like, "okay, 5 months, done." . . . I felt like we were really in control. . . . It would have been way easier for her to give a screaming baby a pacifier. (Alison Neifert, mother)</p>	<p><i>Example:</i> Ann: I take good care of the other kids, of the day-care kids that I have, but I'm not their mom. . . . I don't have, like, that love for them. . . . I mean, I care about them, but they're not mine. You know? And so there's a difference there. (Ann Humphrey, mother)</p>	<p><i>Example:</i> Liam: We want to be the primary influences on how she's raised and brought up. You can go too far toward outsourcing the raising of your kid because at some point you lose the ability to be that primary influence who have the time and the interaction. (Liam Stewart, father)</p>

discipline (teachers) and mealtimes (afterschool program) for her daughter. When it comes to care from grandma, however, her anxieties about someone else doing these caregiving tasks are alleviated: “My mom, yeah, you know, she feeds her and everything during the day. . . . I don’t have anything to worry about when she’s there” (Sienna Sagasta, mother).

Although the village may be framed as a more intimate place than the market (Hochschild 2012), village resources still involve a mind-set of exchange, imposition, and potential role ambiguity that is not felt with the family. As the Greens express, there is a sense of reciprocity involved with the village that, when unbalanced, can hinder its use:

Jill: We have a pretty big circle of friends that—

Ralph: We refer to as the village . . . before I make a request of [them, I think] is it reasonable? Have I asked too much? Have I asked for too much recently? . . . Where are we in the tipping of the scale . . . of giving and getting favors? (Green)

Although similar to the family with regard to the informal and relational nature of the village, a lack of defined roles makes managing substitutability more complicated, leading some parents to instead employ market resources and enlist strategies to manage this tension.

To summarize, in very overt ways, parents’ ability to manage tensions through exercising strategies affects which resources are included in their resource mix. Assemblage theories make explicit the importance of component capacities for being included in an assemblage (DeLanda 2006). For parents’ care assemblages, resources that allowed parents to customize care, deconstruct activities, infrequently utilize, establish presence, or reframe experiences—and therefore, manage tensions—demonstrated greater capacities to be included in the resource mix than those that did not. Even when parents had strong reactions initially, market resources that facilitated these strategies permitted parents to find blurry ground to include paid care services where they once might have insourced. Importantly, our data suggest that family, village, public, and market resources vary in their capacities to resolve certain tensions.

Resource Mix Formation and Revision

Consistent with assemblage theories, the composition of a family’s resource mix is constantly being updated, as new resources move in and others are displaced. The formation and evolution of a family’s resource mix was both intentional (planned and deliberate in the resources used and in what ways) and emergent (responding to changes in salient discourses, unsuccessful tension-minimizing strategies, or resource failures). Callon (1986) refers to many of the examples in these emergent evolutions as “betrayals,” when different components of the assemblage make it challenging or impossible to achieve what the assemblage is meant to do. In this way, care assemblages can be thwarted by different components or the relations among them, and we

found that heightened tensions motivate parents to reconfigure their assemblages.

Parents described emergent decisions as responses to experiences with current resources, exposure to new ones, and changes in family needs, priorities, or resource accessibility. For instance, positive experiences with resources that adequately reduce tensions can build capacity and encourage the continued use of a resource as well as its consideration when developing resource mixes in the future. Equally, betrayals within the care assemblage can trigger tensions that result in a resource’s sudden departure from the mix. The Abreys let go of their full-time nanny in favor of part-time babysitters, in part, to eliminate substitutability fears:

I didn’t want her [the nanny] as entrenched as she was . . . there was some weird . . . understanding that, you know, I’m her mom, like there’s two, um, I don’t know how to say this, not role models, ’cause that’s not right, um, female authorities . . . helping guide her life, and I really wanted to make sure she was understanding that I was her mom and not her nanny. (Rene Abrey, mother)

In this way, tensions prompt the reevaluation of needs and lead to possible reconfiguration of a resource mix. In addition, shifts in material constraints (e.g., employment, finances) can influence resource revision. Job loss can restrict access to certain resources and increase utilization of others. In contrast, an increase in professional responsibilities may result in the adoption of new resources or the outsourcing of additional activities. Resources that are responsive to parents’ tension-minimizing strategies found opportunities here. Recall our earlier examples of meal services that let families customize to exercise control. Finally, relocation can limit access to previously utilized resources, such as when one moves away from family or village connections, and new tensions may be triggered as parents reestablish care resources.

More intentional coordination was frequently instigated by anticipated transitions that predictably changed material components of the assemblage such as the arrival of a child, the onset of a new developmental stage, or changes in location or occupation that demanded parents to reestablish their networks and consider new resources. Parents described their decision-making processes as methodical, researching a range of available resources, weighing financial and time commitments, and carefully choosing the best options. Reflections on these planned decisions were sometimes less grounded in experience and more driven by cultural ideals. That is, planned decisions gave parents time to contemplate how their choices measured up to ideals presented through cultural discourses by institutions such as hospitals, child rearing courses, family backgrounds, or media representations of parenting. Parents also tried to maximize value by finding the most efficient and affordable mix of care resources. Various forms of currency—monetary versus reciprocity—held different values for each family.

For both intentional and emergent (re)assembly of a family’s resource mix, parents revealed explicit and implicit

attempts to maintain an appropriate baseline of internally provided care. Considerations about whether to add an outside resource were weighed against the current resource mix as parents continually assessed whether they were “doing enough” internally versus what they were outsourcing. As Lorna explained, “We ask ourselves that question a lot . . . Do we feel like we’ve gotten enough family time? . . . We both have a pretty good internal compass as to how things are going. . . . We’re very quick to identify when something feels off” (Lorna Abbott, mother). Thresholds relate to both time spent and activities performed.

Alternatively, this baseline can be secured by protecting certain times (weekday evenings, weekends) and activities (discipline, bedtime, milestones) as family only. For instance, parents identify a set of “just us” activities that help to define what being a parent means to them, and these are protected or insourced. Millie offers an example, “Ever since he was a baby, mornings were ours for better or for worse . . . Because that was our cuddle time. Not negotiable . . . I didn’t want to give it up” (Millie Maletz, mother). In either case, parents’ concerns with doing enough suggest that they have a threshold or baseline of activities that stand for their necessary level of care provision. This threshold varied across families, but once they satisfied it, they were able to make trade-offs about which activities they were willing to outsource. In circumstances where parents outsource something that seems especially intimate (e.g., potty training, bedtime stories), examining this activity in the context of the broader resource mix (e.g., what other connective activities are they doing?) helps explain why parents chose to release it to the market.

DISCUSSION

As repeatedly echoed in sociological and consumer research, the hostile worlds dichotomy between the market and family life is pervasive and underlies many of the cultural discourses parents rely on to make sense of decisions about outsourcing care (England 2005; Hays 1996; Hochschild 2012; Huff and Cotte 2013a, 2013b; Kehily 2014; Leach 1977; Schor 2004). The idea that intimate activities should remain outside the purview of the market gives rise to deep-rooted tensions experienced by parents faced with an increasing need for care resources. Grounded in a burgeoning environment of paid commercial care options, our study offers a framework that explicitly investigates these tensions in order to explain care assemblage dynamics. What do we gain from examining tensions? Tensions are prevalent in caregiving decisions and directly affect how parents make sense of their outsourcing choices. Our study moves beyond previous research to explicitly examine how unique tensions differentially shape these choices. Through careful consideration of these divergent effects, our framework contributes to sociological and consumer research in three ways.

First, we identify three key tensions that manifest when assembling care—control, intimacy, and substitutability. By examining a broad range of paid care services, we capture both the tensions that exist in long-term, repetitive arrange-

ments, as well as those that emerge when providers perform iconic tasks on a more temporary basis. We further show how these tensions often emerge from exposure to cultural discourses. Whereas previous research links tensions almost exclusively to discourses of motherhood and femininity (Hochschild 2003; Huff and Cotte 2013b; Macdonald 2010), our work examines caregiving activities strongly identified with both mothers and fathers. Recall our earlier arguments that in the day-care age, parenthood is defined by iconic moments that could involve mom or dad. If we accept this, then by releasing iconic moments to the market, parents’ use of paid care services contributes to a redefinition of parenthood, again challenging parents to consider what really identifies them as parents.

Second, we uncover five tension-minimizing strategies that parents use to enable outsourcing activities they might otherwise have insourced. Specifically, we observe how establishing presence, customization, reframing, infrequent usage, and deconstructing care manifest in order to combat tensions that result when cultural discourses challenge parents’ care decisions. This research also builds upon previous literature which offers the market more generalized action recommendations. Given that a single strategy manifests differently depending on the tension it is addressing, a more nuanced approach that explicitly considers unique tensions is necessary. For example, conventional wisdom suggests that framing the market as kin would alleviate anxieties and guilt around outsourcing (Bradford and Sullivan 2010). In comparison, our findings indicate that there are many ways for resources to get it wrong when adopting this approach. For example, consider *Just Like Family Child Care*’s tagline, “Loving Your Children as Much as You Do.” Although taglines like this might inspire parents to view the market as an intimate sphere, for parents with concerns about intimacy or substitutability, framing paid providers as kin only serves to heighten these tensions. Similarly, *Alter Ego Concierge*’s tagline “Finding the Perfect Substitute for Yourself” may facilitate a parent’s desire to customize or control the experience, but it also is likely to trigger fears around substitutability. Our data further support this conclusion, with parents wanting to receive text messages, photos, and updates from paid care providers when hoping to establish intimacy remotely but being completely opposed to these same activities when substitutability worries were triggered. Further, examining tensions helps us understand how and when particular strategies are included in parents’ care assemblages and link these to other components of the assemblage. More specifically, the ability to effectively execute these strategies enhances a resource’s capacity, propelling certain care resources into the mix while casting others out.

Third, by expanding our focus beyond a single type of resource, we explain how tensions play out in the mix of resources parents enlist to accomplish care. In particular, our framework considers relations among care components and indicates that tensions also differentially affect the resources integrated into parents’ care assemblages. While the use of one resource may aggravate tensions, the use of another

may resolve them. Explicit identification and integration of tensions enables us to directly extend Hochschild's (2012) findings. Arlie Hochschild's work sets the stage for understanding the relationship between the market and family life (2003, 2012). She is highly critical yet empathetic regarding the role of the market in surmounting the care deficit at home. Hochschild's proposed solution, advocated by others (Ruskin and Schor 2005), calls for a return to the village coupled with more support from public/state-sponsored resources. She resists, however, an increased turn toward market resources. The crux of her argument is predicated on the incommensurability of market and domestic spheres, where the former corrupts the latter in its attempts to gain ground. These ideas reflect the long-standing hostile worlds' discourses and philosophies on the separation between public and private spheres that even the original proponents acknowledge is an idealization (Habermas 1962). Our data—and Hochschild's (2012) data by her own admission—reveal that families do not experience such a strict divide. Instead, families weave market, public, village, and family resources together relatively seamlessly in attempts to provide care, and the strategies parents use to minimize tensions are not experienced as “defenses against anything; they feel as natural and unproblematic as opening an umbrella in a storm” (2012, 224).

We agree that with a continuing need to address the care deficit at home, additional public and village resources would benefit parents. We also contend, though, that the for-profit sphere merits a place in this configuration. Without contemplation of the tensions at work, however, it is difficult to determine which resources make the most sense for families. Our data indicate that—as with the market—public, village and family resources exhibit shortcomings that certain tensions heighten. Recall that parents found it difficult to turn to public, village and family resources when control was an issue because directing care in specific ways felt imposing when parents were not paying for the service or when relational consequences were at stake. Substitutability tensions also can be aggravated with the village, where roles are not as clearly defined as those of immediate or extended family members. As with previous general recommendations, this suggests that a reliance on public or village resources can sometimes backfire. We have provided some initial evidence to suggest when the market can alleviate tensions that other types of resources might exacerbate.

The full story is not gained at the individual activity level. Instead, we adopt an assemblage perspective to reconceptualize care. From this view, parents' outsourcing decisions are embedded within assemblages of care, where resource trade-offs and concessions are most apparent. Importantly, tensions difficult to minimize through strategies at the individual activity level can sometimes be diffused in the broader resource mix. More specifically, at the individual activity level, resources may not allow parents to execute tension-alleviating strategies; they may prevent customization, block reframing, or restrict decoupling efforts. When this occurs, parents look to their broader resource mix to

minimize tensions. Similarly, parents relieved persistent tensions around intimacy, for example, by accounting for the connective activities they still provided themselves, or insourced, in their larger resource mix. This helps explain, in part, why parents might outsource activities that garnered a negative reaction initially; it seems less threatening to hire a sleep coach when parents remind themselves that they still retain meal, bed, and bath times. This idea that parents weigh paid care choices in relation to their existing resource mix is only revealed at the assemblage level and can be masked in prior research that focuses more narrowly on individual care decisions. We also observe that parents moved paid care providers in and out of the resource mix to continually minimize tensions. In this way, it is useful to conceptualize the resource mix as dynamic and in flux. Without studying the assemblage level, these findings would remain concealed.

Taken together, our framework adopts an assemblage perspective by considering relations among heterogeneous components such as cultural discourses, experienced tensions, minimizing strategies, resource capacities, and dynamic resource mixes to explain how families make sense of choices about outsourcing care. This framework moves beyond basic motivations for outsourcing care such as expertise, exposure to diverse experiences, and time urgency (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013; Hochschild 2003, 2012; Thompson 1996) to uncover the complexity related to how and why families turn to the market for help. Given consumer researchers' relative silence in outsourcing debates, our study contributes an important layer to this discussion.

This point of departure opens up new areas of inquiry for studying outsourcing and offers implications for both families and paid care providers. In particular, our framework emphasizes the important role of tensions in assemblage formation and reconfiguration. Consider, for example, how our framework might apply to other types of care assemblages. In the context of eldercare, discourses of autonomy and independence regularly arise (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013; Huff and Cotte 2011), with caregivers imposing undesirable identities on elderly consumers that result in struggles to assert agency (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013). These authors note that adult children commonly blend market and family resources into a consumption ensemble that allows them to provide care. Our framework could be used to explain how eldercare assemblages are formed and change based on the tensions families face. Similarly, consumers regularly outsource aspects of personal care as they assemble combinations of market and nonmarket resources for personal grooming (e.g., personal trainer, hairstylist, wardrobe consultant). Our framework would suggest that while managing such an assemblage, relevant cultural discourses become salient. In this case, we may observe discourses of femininity, masculinity, and/or gender fluidity that could raise tensions about what to insource and keep private versus what to outsource. Within a personal care assemblage, betrayals that spark reconfiguration of resources may also be common when resources fail, spark new or different tensions, or as shifts in cultural discourses challenge long-standing grooming rituals.

In addition, more work is needed to investigate the explicit roles of the market in assemblage formation and revision. We found some evidence of ways that the market aids parents in navigating the resource landscape. In particular, market resources may serve as hubs and bundlers. Hubs direct parents out to common resources (e.g., company websites that feature parental forums and blogs). In other words, hubs generate awareness about resources and provide legitimacy or normalcy by ensuring that other parents are outsourcing the same activities. Bundlers, by contrast, bring together several resources into one location, facilitating access and exposure to a wide range of services, and limiting time-intensive search and management of multiple resources. In some cases, bundling actually drove some families to try resources that they would not have otherwise considered by inadvertently relieving outsourcing tensions. Abbey provides an example: “Well actually, he [son] learned to ride a tricycle at day care . . . I’m like really? . . . He got on, and he just went zoomin’ around” (Abbey Richards, mother). Despite that parents may not have considered outsourcing these activities in isolation, when bundled with resources they already deemed acceptable, parents integrated otherwise unthinkable-to-outsource activities into their resource mixes. A better understanding of these facilitating forces would directly contribute to outsourcing debates.

CONCLUSION

The title of our article intentionally calls into question whether parents are, in fact, as the media and some academic accounts contend, outsourcing parenthood. Instead, we found something quite different in how parents characterize their relationships with the market and its place in caring for their children. Parents generate complex and constantly evolving care assemblages in order to protect parenthood—not from the market but from the rigors and constraints of daily life and the hostile worlds discourses they often encounter. Modern day parental support comes in many forms. The optimal mix of resources varied across families, but in all cases in our study, this mix included some element of the market. Sometimes parents turn to the market in their efforts to protect parenthood because it is the resource most capable of resolving felt tensions. Dwelling on a hostile worlds perspective obfuscates what parents are actually doing: creating dynamic care assemblages that work to support families in diverse ways.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

Both the first and second author conducted interviews during the spring of 2012. Data collection took place in participants’ homes in the following cities: Madison, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; Atlanta, Georgia; San Francisco, California; and South Orange, New Jersey. Throughout the interviewing process, the authors had regular discussions about emergent findings. Both authors read each transcript and engaged in coding procedures. Under the direction of the first author, the second author coded transcripts using the NVivo software

program. The authors then jointly analyzed the data to identify emergent themes and generate an axial coding framework.

REFERENCES

- Barnhart, Michelle, and Lisa Peñaloza (2013), “Who Are You Calling Old? Negotiating Old Age Identity in the Elderly Consumption Ensemble,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (April), 1133–53.
- Belk, Russell W., Melanie Wallendorf, and John F. Sherry Jr. (1989), “The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16 (June), 1–38.
- Bennett, Jane (2010), *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bradford, Tonya Williams (2009), “Intergenerationally Gifted Asset Dispositions,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (June), 93–111.
- Bradford, Tonya Williams, and Theresa Sullivan (2010), “Commercial Family Members: Exploring the Continuum of Service Providers,” Working Paper, University of Notre Dame, IN.
- Callon, Michel (1986), “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay,” in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. John Law, London: Routledge, 196–233.
- Canniford, Robin, and Avi Shankar (2013), “Purifying Practices: How Consumers Assemble Romantic Experiences of Nature,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (5), 1051–69.
- Clarke, Alison J. (2007), “Making Sameness: Mothering, Commerce and the Culture of Children’s Birthday Parties,” in *Gender and Consumption: Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life*, ed. Emma Casey and Lydia Martens, Hampshire: Ashgate, 79–96.
- (2014), “Designing Mothers and the Market: Social Class and Material Culture,” in *Motherhoods, Markets, and Consumption*, ed. Stephanie O’Donohoe, Margaret Hogg, Pauline Maclaran, Lydia Martens, and Lorna Stevens, London: Routledge, 43–55.
- Cook, Daniel (2004), *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children’s Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- (2013), “Introduction: Specifying Mothers/Motherhoods,” *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 13 (July), 75–78.
- Coskuner-Balli, Gokcen, and Craig J. Thompson (2013), “The Status Costs of Subordinate Cultural Capital: At-Home Fathers’ Collective Pursuit of Cultural Legitimacy through Capitalizing Consumption Practices,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (June), 19–41.
- Creswell, John W. (2006), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daly, Kerry J. (1996), *Families and Time: Keeping Pace in a Hurried Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- (2001a), “Deconstructing Family Time: From Ideology to Lived Experience,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63 (2), 283–94.
- (2001b), “Minding the Time: Toward a Theoretical Expansion of Time in Families,” in *Minding the Time in Family Experience: Emerging Perspectives and Issues*, ed. Kerry J. Daly, Bingley: Emerald, 1–16.
- DeLanda, Manuel (2006), *A New Philosophy of Society*, New York: Continuum.

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- England, Paula (2005), "Emerging Theories of Care Work," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31 (August), 381–99.
- Epp, Amber M., and Linda L. Price (2008), "Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35 (June), 50–70.
- (2010), "The Storied Life of Singularized Objects: Forces of Agency and Network Transformation," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (February), 820–37.
- (2011), "Family Time in Consumer Culture: Implications for Transformative Consumer Research," in *Transformative Consumer Research for Personal and Collective Well-Being*, ed. David Mick, Simone Pettigrew, Connie Pechmann, and Julie Ozanne, New York: Taylor, 599–622.
- Epp, Amber M., Hope Jensen Schau, and Linda L. Price (2014), "The Role of Brands and Mediating Technologies in Assembling Long-Distance Family Practices," *Journal of Marketing*, 78 (May), 81–101.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1962), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Hays, Sharon (1996), *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie R. (2003), *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (2012), *The Outsourced Self: Intimate Life in Market Times*, New York: Metropolitan.
- Hoovers (2013), "Child Care Services," <http://www.hoovers.com/industry-facts/child-care-services.1833.html>.
- Huberman, A. Michael, and Matthew B. Miles (1994), "Data Management and Analysis Methods," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 428–44.
- Huff, Aimee, and June Cotte (2010), "It's Been My Number One Source of Stress: The Decision to Pay for Care," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 37, ed. Margaret C. Campbell, Jeff Inman, and Rik Pieters, Duluth, MN: Association for Consumer Research, 729–30.
- (2011), "Caught between a Rock and a Hard Place: Adult Children's Consumption of Care Services for Their Elderly Parents," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 38, ed. Darren W. Dahl, Gita V. Johar, Stijn M. J. van Osselaer, Duluth, MN: Association for Consumer Research.
- (2013a), "Solution or Settlement? The Case of Childcare," *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 47 (1), 72–97.
- (2013b), "Using the Marketplace to Reconceptualize Motherhood," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 40, ed. Zeynep Gurhan-Canli, Cele Otnes, and Juliet Rui Zhu, Duluth, MN: Association for Consumer Research.
- Illouz, Eva (2007), *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Jeffrey, Nancy (2005), "When Parents Outsource," *People Magazine*, August 1, <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,20143955,00.html>.
- Kehily, Mary Jane (2014), "How to Be a Mother," in *Motherhoods, Markets, and Consumption*, ed. Stephanie O'Donohoe, Margaret Hogg, Pauline Maclaran, Lydia Martens and Lorna Stevens, London: Routledge, 31–42.
- Lair, Craig Dennis (2007), "The Outsourcing of Intimate Affairs," unpublished dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.
- Larson, Reed, Kathryn Branscomb, and Angela Wiley (2006), "Forms and Functions of Family Mealtimes: Multidisciplinary Perspectives," *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 111 (Spring), 1–15.
- Larson, Reed, and Maryse Richards (1994), *Divergent Realities: The Emotional Lives of Mothers, Fathers, and Adolescents*, New York: Basic.
- Leach, Penelope (1977), *Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age 5*, New York: Knopf.
- Leider, Polly (2009), "Outsourcing Messier Parts of Parenting," *CBS News*, February 11, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/outsourcing-messier-parts-of-parenting/>.
- Macdonald, Cameron (2010), *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marcoux, Jean-Sebastien (2009), "Escaping the Gift Economy," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (December), 671–85.
- McCracken, Grant (1988), *The Long Interview*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Miller, Daniel (1998), *A Theory of Shopping*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Misra, Joya (2003), "Review: Caring about Care," *Feminist Studies*, 29 (Summer), 386–401.
- Nelson, Julie A. (2004), "Feminist Economists and Social Theorists: Can We Talk?" Working Paper, Global Development Environmental Institute, Tufts University.
- O'Donohoe, Stephanie, Margaret Hogg, Pauline Maclaran, Lydia Martens, and Lorna Stevens (2014), *Motherhoods, Markets, and Consumption*, London: Routledge.
- Ruskin, Gary, and Juliet B. Schor (2005), "Every Nook and Cranny: The Dangerous Spread of Commercialized Culture," *Multinational Monitor*, 26 (1–2), 1–5.
- Sassen, Saskia (2006), *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sayre, Shay (2001), *Qualitative Methods for Marketplace Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schor, Juliet B. (2004), *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, New York: Scribner.
- Sellar, Ben (2009), "Assemblage Theory, Occupational Science, and the Complexity of Human Agency," *Journal of Occupational Science*, 16 (2), 67–74.
- Spiggle, Susan (1994), "Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (December), 491–503.
- Stone, Deborah (2000), "Caring by the Book," in *Care Work: Gender, Labor, and the Welfare State*, ed. Madonna H. Meyer, London: Routledge, 89–111.
- Strauss, Anselm L., and Juliet M. Corbin (1990), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Thompson, Craig J. (1996), "Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (March), 388–407.
- Thomson, Rachel, Mary Jane Kehily, Lucy Hadfield, and Sue Sharpe (2011), *Making Modern Mothers*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Urry, John (2012), "Social Networks, Mobile Lives, and Social Inequalities," *Journal of Transport Geography*, 21 (March), 24–30.
- US Census Bureau (2012), "Table C3: Living Arrangements of Children under 18 Years and Marital Status of Parents, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2011," <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2011.html>.

- Zelizer, Viviana (1985), *Pricing the Priceless Child*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (2002), "How Care Counts," *Contemporary Sociology*, 31 (2), 115–19.
- (2005), *The Purchase of Intimacy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (2011), *Economic Lives: How Culture Shapes the Economy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zide, Merry, Ariel Brewster, Janelle Nanos, Nitasha Tiku, Wesley Wade, and Amy Zavatto (2006), "The Outsourced Parent," *New York Magazine*, September 18, <http://nymag.com/family/features/21362/index1.html>.