Alexandra Warren

Autoethnography

Throughout my life, I have been accustomed to living with two working parents. My parents have instilled several morals and values associated with work and life that my sister and I aspire to possess. My mother works at The New York Times and my father is a chiropractor and nutritionist. They both show extreme dedication to their jobs and professions and have worked very hard to succeed. It is very unusual in my neighborhood to have two parents that work. Typically, most of the families I know tend to have only one parent who works, while the other stays home. I often wonder how different my childhood would have been had my mom been a stay-at-home mom. However, I do not think our relationship could be any better. Our relationship as mother and daughter has only prospered and I have so much reverence and respect for her as not only my mother, but as a successful woman in the workforce. I am extremely proud of my parents and all of their accomplishments, not only in their respective fields but in their ability to raise two happy and well adjusted daughters while doing so. My life has forever been impacted by having two working parents. Before this class, I have never really thought about how my life has been impacted from having two working parents. After interviewing my sister, mother, and father my eyes were opened and I realized I would not be where I am today without the influences from both of my parents. My sister and I both agree that having two working parents comes with several benefits that are always outweighed by the negative. Having two successfully working parents has taught me important life lessons that I have brought with me to Emory and that I will continue to possess throughout my life.

An autoethnography is a form of self- reflection and writing that uses the researcher’s personal life experiences and uses these stories in an autobiographical way. Carolyn Ellis defines is as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political.” The autoethnography I conducted was about my life experience on having two working parents. In order to explain this, I interviewed my mother, father, and my sister. My mom is the Executive Vice President of Digital Products and Services for The New York Times. My father is a chiropractor, nutritionist, and dietician. I interviewed my sister because it was important to get her input on growing up with two working parents. By conducting these interviews, I gained a lot of insight on this topic that means so much to my family.

Denise Warren is the Executive Vice President of Digital Products and Services for The New York Times company. This is how the outside world knows her but I know her simply as my mother. As it is impossible to conduct an in person interview, I was able to conduct a video chat interview in our home. This is a comfortable environment for my mother and this type of environment is needed in order to have an effective interview. Until this interview, I never really thought about how my mother dealt with being a working mom. During the course of the interview, it became clear to me that there were several challenges my mother had to confront and I admire her even more knowing how difficult it was from her perspective to accomplish having a great family as well as a great career.

         The first question I asked my mother was, "was it difficult to be among the relatively few working mother's in the neighborhood?"

My mother admitted that there were times where she felt like an outcast. She explains that while she had some close friends who would do anything for her, many of the people who did not know her, made her feel bad about being a working mother. These people were not always as accepting of our different lifestyle and this was most definitely a challenge. I agreed with my mom and could completely understand how difficult it must have been to have [two young girls](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/interview-rachel.html) and going to work without seeing them every morning. I think back to my home friends and the amount of times I would go home with them after school and their mom's would be there to make them food and ask them about their days.

           I then asked her, "how/why did you make the decision to have a family as well as a career?"Like many, she had worked before she had me, her first daughter. She spoke about how she loved her career and loved the intellectual stimulation of her job and how she enjoyed working for a company that had a mission and does something that is good for society. She explained to me how she took a long term view that after 18-20 years, your kids leave you and go into the world. She knew these years would fly by and she felt that working would give her something to do. My mom explained to me that she had found her passion at an organization she was happy working at and she knew wanted to make this work. This was tough and there were times she was torn and it was difficult to leave small babies home with a housekeeper but my mother and father always tried to find the best care. My mom explained how she and my [father](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/interview-jaime.html) always tried to make sure someone was around for the important events, such as sporting events and dance competitions. She mentioned how fortunate we were to live near both sets of grandparents and always have them around. She always said how in the neighborhood we had great relationships and we created a network of people who supported us. She says how it is very challenging being a working mom and at work she is able to have some flexibility in her work schedule, which enabled her to spend more time at home. She also mentioned the advent of technology and how she is able to use computers and systems and work from home when needed. There are times she felt guilty and deeply questioned whether or not this was the right path. Looking back now and having the perspective she has now, my mother can honestly say that she's chosen the right path. She has taught her children you can be successful and have a family and a career. This is so difficult in our society and many women have to make the choice between one of the other, but my mother and I both do not believe this is the case. My mom concluded with the phrase, “I am so happy I am able to be a role model for my daughters in that regard."

I then asked her some of the pros and cons about being a working mother.

My mom started off with the cons and said how there are most definitely more pros to being a working parent, but there are also some cons. She said how she doesn't feel like she spends enough time on herself. She has her family and work and not enough "me" time. "I make it so my family doesn't feel the effects of me working." She does not enough time to go to the gym and do things for herself, such as errands and relaxing. Another con is not spending as much physical time with her kids as other people do. However, the pro to this is that the time spent is quality time and the numbers of hours don't matter. What is important, is how you spend the time. Although there are several cons that arise from being a working mother, there are also several benefits. Working has built an important pillar for my mother and her career and she's been able to have a successful career and a really great and amazing family. She has learned the important of balance and making sure one has the right balance is vital. She also mentioned the obvious benefit of being financially flexible when you have more than one working parent. Perhaps one of the most interesting benefits of working in such an acclaimed company is the people she's met in her work life. Through The New York Times, she's met some of the smartest and most interesting people in the world and this is stimulating for her as an individual.

        The last question I asked my mom was, "what one of the hardest she had to make was ."This question was extremely easy for my mom to answer. She responded with, "whether to accept increasing levels of responsibility at work and the impact it would have on the family. This has happened several times throughout her career and it got easier each time. The approach she took was to rely on her network of friends and her husband was very supportive. When they asked her to return full time they told her that she able to have some flexibility. My mom explained to me how vacations became a great way for us to connect as a family and allows us to recharge and be with one another. "I've really valued the importance of our vacation time." I can agree that family vacations are always my happiest times and I love to share the laughter and stories with my family.

This interview with my mom was extremely influential and useful for my life as an aspiring working woman. I plan to have the same successes as she does and the ability to effectively [balance](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/balance.html) my career as well as a family. These two jobs are equally important to me as an individual and I aspire to be as courageous and brave as my mother is!

Jaime Warren is a chiropractor and has a practice in Lynbrook and also in the house. My dad loves his job and couldn't be happier with his profession. In our house, we call him the "mom" because his hours are more lenient and he is his own boss. The interview I conducted with my dad took place over a video chat and I was really able to head my dad's thoughts on being part of a two parent working family.

I have never really took time to think about my father's job and the role he has had to make to compromise for my mother's busy schedule. This interview made me appreciate my dad even more and I have gained a lot of respect for him as not only my dad, but as an individual. He explained to me the challenges he has faced and that balance is key.

   The first question I asked my dad was, "tell me about your perspective about being a working parent." Since my father is a chiropractor, he has more flexibility in his work schedule. Unlike my mom who commutes to New York City, my dad works from the house or a 40 minute drive away. He told me that he has more freedom because he is his own boss. He makes his own hours and makes sure to put mine and [Rachel's](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/interview-rachel.html) events ahead of his patients. By creating his own work hours, he is able to ease the guilt of my mom going to work and he felt better that he was able to ease this guilt because he was home more with me and my sister. Being his own boss has given him flexibility and the ability to be around as a dad. Throughout school, he enjoyed making our breakfast as much as he enjoyed treating patients. He feels good being able to send us off to school in the morning and if we needed him he would pick us up and come to any of our events. "I got equal satisfaction working and being a father where  some parents (dads) think this is tedious."

       The second question I asked my dad, I also asked my mom. I asked him about the pros and cons of being a working parents and the toll it has taken on his life.

Some of the benefits of working my father explained are getting up and going to work and feeling like you're benefitting the public. He gets to see patients and communicate with adults, while also treating them and saving their lives. He also enjoys having a relationship with his kids, especially because he gets to create his own work hours. One of the cons is that his career has been hindered my my mom's and he does not get to see her as often as he would like. By my dad working less hours, this hinders him from making more money. He says that working really only has its positives and perhaps the only real con is that his business could have been more successful if he invested that time in his business.

      I have always been extremely interested in my dad's typical workday and what is consists of. So, the next question I asked him was, "explain to me your typical work day."

My dad explained to me how his hours have been reduced 50% since I was born, in order to help care for the kids and put [Denise's](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/interview-denise.html) job first. My dad says that he has a dual role. He was there for me and Rachel in the morning and to see if we got to school okay. He would get up in the morning and make us a healthy breakfast. "I got up early and made sure they were well fed because to me, as a nutritionist, breakfast is an important aspect of good health." My dad prepared our school lunches and really took on a motherly role. After Rachel and I went to school, he then went to work and treated patients. During his workday, there were several times he rearranged his schedule for us and then came home when needed.

     The last question, which was the most influential and beneficial to this interview was, "what aspect of your profession has a positive influence on your family?"

My father is able to give so much advice on health and nutrition to our family, as my dad is a [holistic](http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/what-is-holistic-medicine) healthcare provider. "Without good health there is nothing and it is important to pass on my philosophies on health and wellness. This is perhaps the most rewarding thing I can say and hopefully my girls will take these lessons and pass them down." Another positive aspect is the fact that Rachel and I saw our parents working and this gave us something to aspire to. This gave us the other option to explore and to see how a family can be a healthy unit by having a mother and a father work. We became very independent by having two working parents and my father agrees that this independence is good for a person now and in the future with college, meeting friends, and being in the world force.

Rachel is currently a senior in high school who will be attending the [University Of Pennsylvania School of Engineering](http://www.seas.upenn.edu/) in the Fall of 2014. Rachel and I have a very unique relationship as she is my best friend since we are just one year apart. We do everything together from laughing to crying to shopping and even teaming up on our parents. She considers me her role model and after interviewing her on her feelings of growing up with two working parents, our relationship prospered. We have a very similar outlook on this unique lifestyle and how it has affected us.

I conducted a video chat interview session with Rachel to explore her outlook on growing up with two working parents. This was an effective video chat as Rachel was able to feel comfortable in her own house while answering my questions. A video chat is a great way to interview someone as you can see his or her emotions while speaking and really get a feel for how they are reacting to the questions. Video chatting is a great way to keep conversation flowing and increase the interviewer's knowledge on the subject. Both of our parents have been working since as early as we can recall. We never experienced a time where one parents was out of work. Our lives have greatly been affected for the better by this aspect of our family.

I started the interview by asking Rachel simple questions such as, "how was your day?", "how was school" and several other conversation starters to make her feel as comfortable as possible. This interview was not meant to be scary or frightening and this topic is something Rachel and I have spoken a lot about. I asked her perhaps the most important question of the interview, "how do you feel about having two working parents." It was extremely difficult for Rachel to come up with a response and we spoke about this question for an extremely long time. She told me, and I agreed, that she feels honored and different from other people in the neighborhood that she is able to tell others she has grown up with two working parents. She is proud of the lessons she has learned by having parents who have instilled such great work ethics and motivation in their children. She also told me that she feels a sense of freedom and independence. Since our parents are not always home, simple tasks such as taking the dog out, or doing our homework are expected and not asked of us. We have learned to do things on our own in the house and take responsibility for our actions. Taking responsibility is huge, especially when it comes to school and studying. Rachel told me that it is common for her to start her homework as soon as she gets home from school. This is something our parents do not remind us to do, as several of our friends' parents constantly remind their children to finish their homework and study.

The second question I asked Rachel was, "how has your life changed by having two working parents." She began to tell me that she really values and appreciates the time she spends with her parents, since she does not see them as often as other people do. Rachel and I laughed about the fact that our housekeeper was the one who would wake us up in the morning and play board games with us and try to cheer us up after a bad day. We recalled how excited we were to have family dinners every night once our parents got home from work and how happy we were to spend quality time with them. Rachel recalled a story of when she was coming home from school with her friends and she was wondering what was for dinner. As all of her other friends would typically call their mom's to find out what was for dinner, Rachel called Catherine, our housekeeper at the time to find out what she was cooking. By having a live-in housekeeper, Rachel and I have become more accepting of different people and consider her part of our family.

The next question is a vital part of the interview for Rachel and my parents. I asked Rachel what the pros and cons are of having [two working parents](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/). This question is important to ask because I already asked it from a parents point of view and it was interesting to hear it from the child's perspective. It was interesting to see how parallel mine and Rachel's perspectives on this lifestyle are. Rachel began with the cons. She said that growing up it was very difficult to not always have your parents around when you needed them. We both recalled how we were jealous of our friends whose parents (moms) were always home when they got home from school. However, these cons come with several pros. The time spent with our family is extremely valuable and it's quality over quantity. It doesn't matter how much time I spend with my family, it's how we spend our time. Since we have two working parents, Rachel and I value family vacations. This is a great time to relax and enjoy one anthers company. Another pro Rachel mentioned are the values and morals this lifestyle has taught her.

Having two successfully working parents shows us the importance of [balance](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/balance.html) and independence. We have grown up being very independent and not relying on our parents for help with homework or studying. When we got home from school, we would go straight to our bedrooms and do our homework until it was finished. Our parents were never there to punish us if we didn't do our work or teach us proper ways to study. We had to figure this out on our own. This is a huge pro of my childhood as it has made me the person I am today. Rachel and I both consider ourselves very independent women with outstanding work ethics. We both got into our early decision schools and believe this is due to our habits our parents instilled in us at a very young age. Although having two working parents may seem to contain several cons, the positives outweigh the negatives and Rachel and I couldn't be happier with our situation.

Several valuable lessons coincide with having two working parents. When I tell people that I have [two working parents](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/), their responses are always negative and along the lines of, "oh, so you don't spend a lot of time with your parents?" However, they do not take time to look at the bigger picture and evaluate the situation. Although there are some negative aspects of having two working parents, the benefits of this situation outweigh the bad. The major lessons I've learned throughout my life, in regards to having two working parents, are [dedication](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/dedication.html), [balance](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/balance.html), [work ethic](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/work-ethic.html), and [family first](http://livingwithtwoworkingparents.weebly.com/family-first.html).