[Assignment: Consider relationships within your family, comparing and contrasting them with each other. This analysis might rest along gender lines, age lines, or time lines. With such a topic you might also explore the way your family relationships and/or roles have changed through time or how they have remained the same.]

My past has been full of adventure, living in five different countries in eighteen years, and in these countries I have been forced to look inside my family for most of my guidance, due to the lack of stable outside influences. By living with my mother and father, and paying close attention to their mannerisms and actions, I have uncovered many differences between them. The statement that "opposites attract" is proven to be true by my parents. Despite some similarities, their relationship seems to be based upon compromising on their differences. My mother, being the more analytical and emotional one, seems to have a lot of influence over my father, the easy-going, all-knowing teddy bear, but despite conflict in their personalities and backgrounds, they have built a successful marriage.

Christine Marie Ambriz was born in Santa Barbara, California. Shortly after her birth she moved to the outskirts of Kansas City, Missouri, and was raised in a very small town. Her family owned a quaint house on a lake. She was the eldest of eight children, which gave her the responsibility of a second mother. My mother took care of the housework, cooking, washing the dishes and cleaning the house, while her mother watched over her other brothers and sisters. Her parents were a match made in heaven. My grandfather was the perfect loving husband, and my grandmother, being a perfect wife, created a caring environment for my mother to be raised in. Because of this environment my mother lived at home until marrying my father in her late twenties.

On the other hand, Thomas Edward Mitchell, my father, was born and raised in downtown New Jersey. He lived in a small town house with two brothers and one sister. He too was the eldest and was given a lot of responsibilities, but his came about because of other reasons. His parents were not finding it easy to live with one another. My grandfather was a train engineer, and struggled to bring home enough money to support his good-sized family. Therefore my father was forced to hold a job delivering papers at the age of twelve. All my father’s responsibilities and his unhappy family situation encouraged him to move out of the house once he finished high school. At the age of seventeen my father joined the army. My parents were raised in totally different atmospheres and lifestyles, which taught them different lessons about life. By incorporating the things they had learned about growing up and life itself, they were able to place a foundation on which to build their family.
My mother's personality is a lot different than my dad's. Her major character trait is her ability to analyze everything and make the simplest of problems into a world issue. My father on the other hand is very short and direct. When either my sister or I ask him a question, my father will give us a short, to-the-point answer that answers our question. Mom gives us a long drawn out speech off the topic, and usually ends up not answering our question. On the way to my new house from the airport, during March break, I asked my mother how she liked Seattle. As expected, twenty minutes later we were pulling into the driveway, and she still hadn't really answered my question. Dad knows more about everything than any man I have ever known. He has an answer for everything which is ninety-nine percent correct; the other one percent sounds right. My father, having been a teacher in the army and a big business executive in an aerospace company his whole life, knows everything about planes, aeronautical instruments, and many other army-related machinery. He could also tell a person anything one needs to know about politics, chemistry or many other topics.

My mother is the epitome of organization. She is the kind of woman that color coordinates her sweaters on the shelf in her closet. Dad still hasn't "gotten around to it." Mom also likes to have everything planned before the week starts. She says, "If it's not written in my calendar, it's not going to get done." She plans weeks ahead of time, and when we go on family trips she packs a week before we leave. My easy-going father enjoys being spontaneous and never packs his travel bag any sooner than an hour before he leaves. This type of packing sometimes acts as a fail safe. Two hours before we were about to go on our summer vacation to the Grand Canyon in 1994, my father had just started to pack. Moments later, my father started panicking because he couldn't find the tickets. My mother nonchalantly walked over to her carry-on bag, that she packed two days before, and pulled out the tickets she had found under the stack of bills in my father's closet.

In any relationship, the couple must have a common pastime to share with each other. My parents didn't. For my father's entire life his idea of fun was going to the movies and chomping on popcorn, and my mother's was going to learn how to line dance. My father was never a dancer and will never be one, so he won on the subject of where to go on their weekend date. Every weekend, without fail, my father takes my mother out for dinner and a movie. It's kind of cute. My father, a devoted business man, would love to think of himself as an outdoors type. He is fascinated with the thought of nature and roughing it, yet he could never live without a computer, Star Trek, and microwave popcorn. Honestly, he is pretty boring. Mom, on the other hand, knows how to party and have fun. She is the kind of mom that is fun to hang out with, or go with to the mall. My mother's ideal vacation is to visit her parents. She is the homebody type person who loves to be around people who love her. My father works this out by making sure my mother has a chance to see her family in the middle of the year. For summer vacations, my parents mutually decide on a vacation spot.

Religion has always played a strong role in my life, and this is due to the fact that both my parents have given their life to God. Religiously, my mother is a great person. She is not a fanatic, but a strong Catholic,
and she doesn't hesitate to let others know the "good news" or to lend a helping hand. About a year ago, when we were living in Toronto, Canada, my mother was driving me home from swim practice and we saw a lady pushing her car out of the middle of the highway. My mother pulled over and walked over to help the lady push her car to the side of the road. After the car was on the side of the road, my mother gave the woman a long hug, and said the words, "God bless you," in the woman's ear. Dad is also a strong Catholic, but he tends to keep it to himself, like he does a lot of his feelings. Mom isn't shy in sharing how she feels, in a polite way. Mom is always up to the challenge of making us attend church, but on the odd Sunday, when she isn't up for it, my dad steps in and gets us moving.

I see my parents as being the epitome of difference, but they have been able to reconcile their differences and raise two good kids. Despite many differences in the way they were brought up and in their own personalities, they have been able to compromise on their own beliefs and build a successful marriage and family. To marry a person is an accomplishment in itself, but to be able to love them more than when they entered the marriage is honorable. On many occasions, both my parents have stated how their love for each other has grown. My parents have formed a strong bond that is sensitive to the other person's feelings, and have learned to see the good intentions demonstrated by each other. My mother learned how to be a good wife from her mother, and my father learned what not to do from his father, and by accepting each other's humanity and compromising on their differences they have built a beautiful relationship.

EQUAL CHILDREN
by
Melissa Fann
Business Major
Harlem High School, Machesney Park, IL

[Assignment: Write a paper that makes a point about gender. Structure your essay as a narrative, description, or comparison.]

As a general rule, parents try to raise male and female children differently. Society wants girls to be taught to do indoor chores, such as setting the table and vacuuming. Boys, on the other hand, are to be taught to do manual labor, such as mowing the lawn and taking out the garbage. Generally, girls are the ones that parents hand everything to.