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By Emilie Le Beau

## A crisis of confidence

Roger Fierro can change a wet diaper and soothe a crying baby, but as a male baby-sitter, or "manny," Fierro has a hard time finding families who trust him to care for their kids.

"It's the kind of job you associate with 12-year-old girls," said Fierro, 20, a student at the University of Chicago. "Men aren't seen as having maternal skills or knowing what to do." Too, some parents may even worry that male baby-sitters are predators in disguise.

With eight years of experience, Fierro believes himself to be a great sitter. But his only baby-sitting jobs come from family or friends. So he signed up with SitterCity.com, an online match service for baby-sitters and parents.

Three months later, Fierro hasn't had one offer, though female friends get regular gigs.

SitterCity.com has 100,000 sitters nationwide; 2 percent are mannies, said Genevieve Thiers, founder and CEO. "Every guy baby-sitter I've met has been absolutely fantastic," she said. But many parents consider mannies only to care for all-boy families. Even if a family has more boys than girls, parents are likely to choose a female as "a default," Thiers said.

Baby-sitting wasn't always female dominated. In the 1930s and '40s, women were expected to watch children for free. "The idea of woman charging for watching kids was met with outrage," Thiers said. Male sitters were seen as honest, hardworking guys, whereas female sitters were considered "hussies" who had the nerve to charge, she said.

After the 1950s, parents preferred phone-talking teenage girls over men baby-sitters. Now manny jobs are scarce for guys like Fierro.

"I guess sitting is still a 'girl's club,' but gender discrimination is nothing new," he said.