

Married Fathers' and Mothers' Time With Children:
Gender Differences in the Role of Parents' and Their Spouses' Employment

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The time that married fathers spend caring for their children has risen markedly over the past 20 years (Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson 2004). Mothers' time with children rose over this period, too, resulting in a narrowed but still substantial gender gap in parental time investments in children (Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie 2006; Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson 2004). Mothers' increased investments in child care coincided with continuing growth in maternal labor force participation, prompting some scholars to argue that women today face heightened social pressure to conform to a standard of "intensive mothering" (Hays 1996) defined in part by large time expenditures on children. The factors underlying fathers' increased time with children have received less attention. In this paper, we examine the circumstances under which married fathers increase – or decrease – their time with children and explore how these circumstances differ from the factors that promote or inhibit mothers' time investments in children.

We focus on four questions. First, given that norms of motherhood center on maternal responsibility for child care while norms of fatherhood often emphasize breadwinning over care giving, we ask whether fathers' work circumstances (including employment status, occupation and work shift) are more closely associated with time with children than mothers' work circumstances. Second, we examine the role of spouse's work circumstances. While most mothers are married to men who work full time, many fathers are married to women who work part time or are unemployed. Fathers married to wives who work full time may spend more time with children either because their wives have less time available or because their wives earn a larger share of the family income and are therefore in a stronger bargaining position (Lundberg and Pollak 1996). Thus, we explore whether fathers' spouses' work circumstances are more closely related to time with children than mothers' spouses' work circumstances.

Third, we consider the relationship between parental education and time with children. Previous research consistently finds that mothers who are college educated spend more time with children than less educated mothers (Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson 2004; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001). Educational differences may be related to childrearing norms, with more highly educated mothers feeling greater pressure to live up to intensive parenting norms or having greater ability to meet them (Lareau 2002). We study the relationship between fathers' education and time with children as a strong, positive relationship between education and fathers' time with children could represent new pressure toward "intensive fathering" (Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie 2006). Fourth, we take into account the role of children's gender. Following studies that find that child gender is associated with fathers' time and with other aspects of parent-child relationships (Mammen 2005; Harris, Raley, and Rindfuss 2002), we explore whether having only same-sex or opposite-sex children is associated with greater or lesser parental expenditures of time with children.

Our data come from the 2003 and 2004 American Time Use Surveys (ATUS). The ATUS collects time diaries, which have been shown to be a more accurate means of measuring time use than general surveys, which often produce overestimates of time expenditures (Gershuny and Robinson 1988). The ATUS (N=20,720 in 2003 and N=14,000 in 2004) also provides much larger

samples than were collected in earlier U.S. time diaries. These large samples make it possible to examine in detail the activities parents engage in when they are with their children and to study factors such as parental occupation and other aspects of employment, spousal labor force status, child gender and family structure.

We pool data from the 2003 and 2004 ATUS and limit our analysis to married or cohabiting fathers and mothers because we are interested in understanding factors associated with gender differences in parents' time with children. Single parents who are not cohabiting do not have the option of bargaining over which parent undertakes which activities with children. With this restriction, our sample consists of 4,770 married fathers and 5,428 married mothers with at least one child under age 18 living at home.

Until recently, most studies of parents' time with children defined this time narrowly, measuring it in terms of active care parents provided to children, such as feeding, bathing, reading and playing. Some studies also included time when parents were engaged in a different activity they considered their primary focus, such as chores, but reported that they were simultaneously caring for children. But parental time with children is hard to quantify. Meaningful interactions can occur in the midst of a shopping excursion or when a child runs into a room to ask a question. In addition, parents devote less time to primary child care activities such as feeding, bathing and play as children age and devote more time to joint activities with children. As a result, studies that ignore the time parents spend on socializing or household chores while in their children's company may overlook much of the time parents spend with children who are beyond the early school years.

For these reasons, we define parental time broadly using multiple measures. These include: total time during the 24-hour diary period during which parents reported that they were with their children ("Total"); time parents spent actively caring for their children, either providing basic, custodial care ("Basic care") such as feeding and bathing or providing interactive care ("Interactive") such as reading or playing; time spent shopping in the company of children ("Shopping"); time spent on household chores in the company of children ("Household chores"); time spent eating meals with children present ("Meals"); time spent in leisure activities such as attending sporting events or social gatherings in the company of children ("Leisure"); and time spent watching television with children present ("Television"). These activities account for the vast majority of time (more than 95 percent) during which parents reported that they were with their children. As we are interested in gender differences in parents' time with children and previous analyses using other data sets have found that fathers are less likely than mothers to supervise children without their spouse or another adult (Craig 2006), our planned analyses also include an additional measure: lone time fathers and mothers spend with their children but without their spouse or another adult.

Our independent variables of interest include measures of parent's occupation (professional, manager, or other), parent's work hours (full-time, part-time, or no paid work), spouse's work hours (full-time, part-time, varying hours or no paid work), parent's education (college degree, high school degree, no high school degree), and children's gender (all male, all female, mixed). In addition, we control for other variables previously found to be related to parental time with children. These are parent's age, parent's marital status (married or cohabiting), the number of children under age five, the number of children between ages five and 17, the presence of additional adults in the household (grandparent, other relative, non-relative), parent's race, the diary day falling on a holiday and/or a weekend, region of the country, survey year (2003 or 2004), and season.

In studying parental time with children, it is important to recognize that not all parents spend any time with their children in a given activity on a given day. Thus, analyses of parental time use

are left-censored. For this reason, we use tobit regression, which takes censoring into account. All analyses are performed separately for mothers and fathers because mothers and fathers have quite different patterns of time use. We begin our analysis with descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables, including a discussion of differences between fathers' and mothers' average time with children in different activities. We then turn to multivariate models to probe the relationship between our independent variables and varying measures of parental time. Like all time use diary data in the United States, the ATUS data are cross-sectional. Thus, we use multivariate analysis in a descriptive manner to identify relationships between independent and dependent variables and do not assume that these relationships are causal.

In most respects, the profiles of mothers and fathers in our sample are similar. Not

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

surprisingly, however, parents differ along gender lines in terms of employment and spouse's employment. Mothers are more likely than fathers to work part time or not at all, while fathers are more likely to have spouses who work part time or are unemployed. In addition, fathers are almost twice as likely as mothers to hold managerial jobs (17 percent versus 9 percent).

As found in previous studies, fathers in the ATUS spend less time with children than

(TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE)

mothers. On average, fathers spend only two third as much total time in the presence of their children than mothers do in a given day – four and a quarter hours compared with almost six and a half for mothers. For six of the eight measures of time use, differences between the average time fathers and mothers spend with children are statistically significant. The only exceptions are leisure time and television watching time, which are similar for fathers and mothers. Compared with fathers, mothers spend almost twice as much of their total time with children on basic child care and household chores, which may be less optional and less pleasurable than other activities with children (Craig 2006).

Preliminary multivariate analysis provides partial support for our hypothesis that fathers'

(TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE)

work circumstances are more closely related to time with children than mothers' work circumstances. Occupation is a more important predictor of fathers' than mothers' time, with fathers in high-status occupations reporting more time with children. Among fathers, for instance, holding a professional job is associated with more total time, more basic and interactive care time, more meal time and more leisure time with children. For both fathers and mothers, time with children declines as work level increases. The negative relationship between work and both basic and interactive time with children is larger, however, for fathers than for mothers, while the negative relationship between work and total time is greater for mothers (inter-model t-tests not shown).

Spouse or partner's employment matters for both fathers and mothers but in different ways. Fathers with employed spouses spend more time on basic and interactive child care and more time on household chores with children present than do fathers whose wives or partners do not work. Compared with mothers whose spouses do not work, mothers with employed spouses also spend more time on chores and more time shopping with children. They also spend less time on leisure activities and television watching with children present.

Education is positively associated with total time with children for mothers but not for fathers. However, more highly educated parents spend more time on basic and interactive child care regardless of gender. Among fathers, education is positively associated with leisure time in the company of children, and holding a college degree is positively associated with meal time with

children. More highly educated parents of both genders spend less time watching television in the company of children than do parents without a high school degree.

Parent and child gender also matters. Fathers whose children are all female spend less total time with children than do fathers with some male or only male children. Fathers whose children are all female also spend less time than fathers with only male children on basic and interactive care and on television watching in the company of children. Mothers with only female children spend more total time with children and less television time with children than do mothers with only male children. In addition, mothers who have male and female children spend more time than mothers with only male children on basic and interactive care, while mothers who have only male children spend less time on meals than other mothers.

In future analyses for this paper, we plan to link the ATUS data set to the Current Population Survey (CPS) and to the CPS work shift supplement. This will enable us to code and include the following additional measures of parental and spouse employment: parent's work shift; spouse's work shift; and spouse's occupation. These variables will allow us to more fully explore variation in parents' time with children across differing employment circumstances of dual-earner couples, a topic of interest given recent increases in work hours among dual-earner couples in high-status professions (Jacobs and Gerson 1998) and the increased likelihood that fathers will provide child care when they and their wives work different shifts (Brayfield 1995). We will also explore potential interaction effects, including the possibility that the relationship between parental employment status and time with children varies with spouse's employment or with parent's education.

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Table 1. Independent Variables Included in the Analysis

Variable	Fathers		Mothers	
	Mean or Percentage	Std. Dev.	Mean or Percentage	Std. Dev.
Professional	0.19	0.39	0.20	0.40
Manager	0.17	0.38	0.09	0.29
Other occupation	0.55	0.50	0.35	0.48
Unemployed	0.08	0.27	0.34	0.48
Full time worker	0.88	0.33	0.42	0.49
Part time worker	0.04	0.20	0.23	0.42
Spouse works full time	0.43	0.50	0.83	0.37
Spouse works part time	0.20	0.40	0.04	0.19
Spouse work hours vary	0.02	0.13	0.04	0.20
Spouse unemployed	0.35	0.48	0.09	0.28
College degree	0.34	0.47	0.33	0.47
High school diploma	0.54	0.50	0.56	0.50
No high school diploma	0.12	0.33	0.11	0.31
All female children	0.31	0.46	0.30	0.46
Female and male children	0.37	0.48	0.37	0.48
All male children	0.32	0.46	0.33	0.47
Cohabiting	0.03	0.18	0.05	0.22
Married	0.97	0.18	0.95	0.22
Grandparent in home	0.02	0.14	0.02	0.13
Other relative in home	0.06	0.24	0.05	0.22
Other non-relative in home	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.13
Age	39.10	8.27	37.07	8.04
Number own children 5-17	1.26	1.02	1.25	1.02
Number own children under 5	0.66	0.79	0.66	0.82
Black, non-Hispanic	0.09	0.29	0.07	0.25
Hispanic	0.17	0.38	0.17	0.37
Asian	0.04	0.20	0.03	0.18
Other race	0.03	0.16	0.03	0.17
White	0.67	0.47	0.71	0.45
Diary day on holiday	0.02	0.13	0.02	0.13
Diary day on weekend	0.30	0.46	0.28	0.45
Northeast	0.18	0.38	0.18	0.39
Midwest	0.25	0.43	0.24	0.43
West	0.25	0.43	0.24	0.43
South	0.32	0.47	0.33	0.47
Surveyed in 2004	0.51	0.50	0.50	0.50
Surveyed in 2003	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.50
Fall	0.26	0.44	0.25	0.43
Spring	0.25	0.44	0.25	0.43
Winter	0.24	0.43	0.24	0.43
Summer	0.25	0.43	0.26	0.44
N	4770		5428	

Table 2. Parents' Time With Children Present

	Fathers			Mothers			Difference Between Fathers' and Mothers' Means	Ratio of Fathers' to Mothers' Time
	Mean	Std Dev	Pct Total	Mean	Std Dev	Pct Total		
Basic care	30.57	1.11	0.12	77.25	1.77	0.20	***	0.40
Interactive care	26.83	1.00	0.11	44.97	1.14	0.12	***	0.60
Shopping	16.51	0.83	0.06	28.30	0.97	0.07	***	0.58
Household chores	23.90	1.05	0.09	63.10	1.63	0.16	***	0.38
Eating	46.37	1.05	0.18	55.81	1.00	0.15	***	0.83
Leisure	48.90	1.76	0.19	55.33	1.56	0.14		0.88
Television	54.57	1.66	0.21	53.06	1.52	0.14		1.03
Total	254.82	4.10		384.81	4.42		***	0.66

*p<.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 3. Tobit Models For Time (In Minutes) Parents Are Engaged in Activities While Children Are Present

Variable	Total		Basic Care		Interactive Care		Shopping	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Intercept	321.41** (29.40)	430.67** (30.49)	-39.01* (16.00)	30.48* (14.96)	-14.21 (15.41)	2.05 (11.80)	-96.27* (39.37)	-82.03** (23.52)
Occupation (other omitted)								
Professional	26.59** (9.30)	5.77 (9.61)	20.72** (4.65)	5.13 (4.58)	16.14** (4.89)	-2.99 (3.56)	-10.35 (12.65)	-7.12 (7.96)
Manager	3.87 (9.50)	-3.01 (10.34)	9.73* (4.81)	10.00 (5.75)	14.82* (6.10)	8.21* (3.94)	-32.35* (12.61)	-24.86** (9.44)
Employment (unemployed omitted)								
Full time worker	-113.34** (14.60)	-162.88** (9.27)	-51.94** (8.01)	-40.14** (4.45)	-43.07** (6.37)	-31.08** (3.77)	-16.07 (15.06)	-25.71** (7.09)
Part time worker	-78.09** (23.72)	-95.11** (10.05)	-16.43 (13.29)	-20.49** (4.50)	-29.44** (10.99)	-9.52* (3.93)	-19.21 (29.30)	-14.51 (7.58)
Spouse/partner employment (unemployed omitted)								
Spouse works full time	9.99 (8.36)	7.29 (11.61)	21.90** (4.33)	9.13 (6.59)	14.79** (4.49)	3.74 (4.86)	-8.73 (9.98)	20.14* (10.21)
Spouse works part time	6.25 (9.78)	-21.36 (22.40)	13.12** (4.95)	-14.19 (9.64)	16.30** (5.04)	-4.02 (7.98)	-14.14 (12.02)	-10.03 (18.60)
Spouse work hours vary	27.5 (22.42)	3.33 (19.37)	30.14* (12.97)	16.34 (11.17)	28.43* (12.37)	10.69 (8.66)	18.92 (30.63)	29.19 (15.99)
Education (no high school diploma omitted)								
College degree	15.46 (15.05)	67.98** (14.87)	47.05** (8.98)	54.17** (7.43)	31.39** (8.15)	53.58** (6.10)	3.91 (16.87)	56.14** (11.94)
High school diploma	6.32 (14.08)	34.63* (13.87)	30.04** (8.54)	26.22** (6.73)	19.48* (7.71)	28.78** (5.89)	-13.47 (14.50)	22.76* (10.80)
Child gender (all male omitted)								
All female children	-30.57** (9.23)	20.36* (8.46)	-13.23** (4.81)	5.75 (3.96)	-14.27** (4.60)	5.29 (3.45)	-13.4 (10.93)	13.09 (6.89)
Female and male children	9.82 (9.52)	14.71 (9.78)	6.84 (5.34)	17.88** (5.31)	0.73 (4.87)	10.68** (3.61)	11.17 (12.00)	9.77 (7.27)
Marital status (married omitted)								
Cohabiting	-3.50 (24.92)	-8.68 (16.51)	-7.95 (13.23)	-4.38 (8.73)	11.37 (13.39)	-11.32 (7.32)	-59.62* (26.43)	-5.48 (13.06)
Other adults in home								
Grandparent in home	-22.07 (21.24)	12.16 (33.34)	20.55 (19.59)	25.75 (13.84)	-15.29 (16.79)	-11.76 (12.90)	-136.02** (39.68)	-30.57 (28.42)
Other relative in home	23.94 (19.22)	-7.70 (20.02)	12.85 (10.80)	-16.18* (8.11)	20.59 (10.89)	-10.12 (7.61)	7.42 (20.84)	16.44 (13.95)
Other non-relative in home	-67.44* (33.14)	-38.23 (26.98)	-11.65 (16.54)	-5.31 (11.31)	-21.16 (22.03)	-42.18** (12.90)	29.2 (37.09)	-38.71 (27.64)
Censored <i>n</i>	507	227	2598	1553	2860	2320	3858	3697
Noncensored <i>n</i>	4263	5201	2172	3875	1910	3108	912	1731

**p*<.05; ** *p*<.01 (two-tailed tests)

Table 3 Continued. Tobit Models For Time (In Minutes) Parents Are Engaged in Activities While Children Are Present

Variable	Household Chores		Meals		Leisure		Television	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Intercept	-133.54** (25.90)	5.61 (16.17)	40.45** (11.17)	65.96** (9.27)	-35.12 (35.52)	16.09 (23.64)	73.50** (27.91)	134.35** (21.43)
Occupation (other omitted)								
Professional	2.55 (7.74)	0.34 (5.13)	9.68** (2.91)	-6.75* (2.73)	33.48** (10.42)	9.43 (7.59)	-11.74 (9.23)	4.46 (7.71)
Manager	-12.5 (7.97)	6.63 (5.95)	1.34 (2.95)	-1.54 (3.28)	8.16 (11.09)	-2.21 (8.96)	-6.63 (9.13)	-4.9 (8.62)
Employment (unemployed omitted)								
Full time worker	-44.96** (10.54)	-47.26** (4.98)	-19.69** (6.07)	-22.00** (2.59)	-50.50** (16.89)	-52.43** (7.31)	-29.33* (13.14)	-48.07** (6.67)
Part time worker	-43.04** (16.53)	-24.92** (5.19)	-13.29 (8.79)	-7.30* (2.95)	-66.01** (24.42)	-27.44** (7.18)	-26.53 (19.69)	-34.28** (7.02)
Spouse/partner employment (unemployed omitted)								
Spouse works full time	39.37** (7.07)	22.27** (6.80)	-2.85 (2.59)	-0.72 (4.00)	2.59 (9.09)	-24.66* (9.89)	-10.99 (7.64)	-23.65* (9.50)
Spouse works part time	27.92** (7.96)	36.66** (11.22)	3.26 (3.52)	-13.76* (5.35)	14.85 (11.07)	-44.67** (16.15)	-5.36 (8.92)	-25.43 (19.73)
Spouse work hours vary	88.72** (25.98)	15.82 (10.74)	-5.42 (6.89)	-1.49 (6.47)	-5.14 (25.17)	-32.71* (15.32)	-30.52 (19.97)	-38.54** (13.81)
Education (no high school diploma omitted)								
College degree	18.28 (12.27)	-20.98* (8.78)	16.83** (5.30)	21.83** (4.39)	35.85* (18.19)	67.08** (12.90)	-76.72** (12.60)	-53.78** (10.44)
High school diploma	3.73 (11.01)	-15.93 (8.18)	5.49 (4.96)	7.54 (3.94)	21.29 (16.99)	54.45** (11.98)	-31.63** (10.77)	-26.73** (9.07)
Child gender (all male omitted)								
All female children	-8.42 (7.38)	6.17 (4.60)	1.98 (2.98)	7.24** (2.42)	-3.76 (10.21)	10.82 (6.60)	-24.21** (8.28)	2.30 (6.49)
Female and male children	5.17 (7.46)	-0.51 (5.00)	4.45 (3.15)	7.83** (2.81)	5.65 (10.59)	8.17 (7.51)	1.11 (8.21)	0.06 (6.58)
Marital status (married omitted)								
Cohabiting	-13.9 (17.53)	-15.16 (9.86)	-7.31 (8.66)	-21.11** (4.80)	-0.70 (26.87)	14.52 (13.02)	4.01 (20.81)	-4.08 (12.38)
Other adults in home								
Grandparent in home	-38.63 (23.90)	-5.19 (17.30)	-11.66 (10.79)	-9.49 (9.06)	-55.59 (37.78)	6.57 (19.58)	51.07 (28.34)	-1.70 (25.78)
Other relative in home	-3.73 (13.86)	-11.82 (10.68)	5.98 (7.97)	-3.44 (4.68)	-2.76 (22.00)	-31.35 (16.01)	-14.19 (14.64)	23.1 (14.32)
Other non-relative in home	-77.40** (25.15)	-2.91 (19.91)	-8.76 (10.69)	-5.99 (7.04)	-73.76* (34.14)	34.05 (27.22)	-4.67 (32.71)	-27.19 (25.07)
Censored <i>n</i>	3215	1873	1257	987	2826	2728	2793	3030
Noncensored <i>n</i>	1555	3555	3513	4441	1944	2700	1977	2398

**p*<.05; ** *p*<.01 (two-tailed tests)