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ABSTRACT:

We provide the first study of time use patterns among parents of children under the age of one year. Using a sample of 2,081 time diary respondents to the American Time Use Survey, diverse measures of childcare time uniformly find coupled fathers, coupled mothers, and single mothers spending more time on the care of infants relative to older children. Additional time for infants among fathers is generated mainly by reductions in housework and leisure time, while both coupled and single mothers scale back work along with other activities. The single mothers also sleep more when caring for infants. Regression analyses suggest that teenage girls and grandparents often help with childcare. Work typically reduces childcare time, although shiftwork among fathers has an opposite effect. Hispanics and particularly African Americans spend less time on childcare, while highly educated parents and those with managerial or professional occupations exhibit elevated levels of childcare time. Other evidence suggests that middle class parents both work long hours and engage in intensive mothering or parenting of infants. Single mothers may confront a trade-off between employment to escape poverty and the time they can devote to their children.

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Do parents of infants spend their time differently than parents of older children? Although an extensive body of research concerns time use among parents, no previous study has directly answered this question. Data from the initial four waves of the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) allow us to do so here.

Why would the parenting of infants be unique? First, infants may be very demanding, causing time use for parents of infants to diverge substantially from patterns for parents of older children. Few newborns sleep through the night, so their parents may be sleep deprived. Infants also require frequent feeding, changing of diapers, rocking, reading, holding, walking, soothing, and bathing. Most of these duties diminish, disappear or otherwise change as children grow, supporting the claim that parents of infants will exhibit unique time use patterns.

Second, infant care is often viewed as more important or valuable to parents and to society than care for older children. This claim is implicit in the paid maternity leave systems that allow mothers to devote themselves to infant care in most nations (Heymann, Earle and Hayes 2007). This claim also explains in part why mothers of newborns in the U.S. often experience substantial internal and external pressures to quit employment (Stone 2007).

Each of these arguments suggests that it will be worthwhile to analyze infant care – and specifically care by parents. Therefore, below we identify mother and father patterns of childcare time for infants as opposed to older children, compare overall structures of time allocation across these two groups, and identify the factors that contribute to, or detract from, time with infants.

BACKGROUND

To date, no time use study has explicitly identified the time allocation patterns of parents of infants. The reason for this omission is that no sufficiently large sample of parents of infants has been available. As a result, one of the most recent and comprehensive studies of time use among parents in the U.S., by Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006), analyzes parents similarly, regardless of the age of their dependent children.

Previous Research

Although we know little directly about time use among parents of infants, some studies have analyzed time use patterns among parents of younger children. Dutch data suggest that coupled mothers increase, while fathers reduce, childcare time as the number of preschool aged children increases (Dijk and Siegers 1996). Similarly, U.S. data on parent couples show that father involvement related to childcare time rises as the youngest child ages, while mother involvement decreases, and suggests that fathers are more involved with male children (Wood and Repetti 2004). We therefore expect to find fathers devoting less time to infants, relative to older children, and mothers devoting more time.

Findings regarding employment and work hours are consistent with these expectations. Research finds small increases in working time among fathers of new children (Hamermesh 1996). Average father time devoted to work increases even further if the mother quits employment following child arrival (Moen and Roehling 2005). Further, compared to parents of older children, U.S. data from 2000 show the lowest rates of mother employment and of working time among mothers of infants, while the highest work hours among fathers are reported by those with infants (Bianchi et al 2006). To the extent that working time reduces childcare time, this evidence again points to relatively lower levels of childcare time among fathers of infants, with higher levels for mothers.

However, this gendered pattern may have shifted in recent years. An analysis of 1997 time diary data from the U.S. found that father childcare time is highest when the youngest child is aged zero to two years (Yeung et al 2001). The authors also found highly educated fathers, or those with boys, spending more time on childcare. It is therefore possible that rising levels of father involvement in recent decades (e.g., Bianchi et al 2006) are associated with particularly high levels of father care for infants.

For partnered, employed mothers, research suggests that shiftwork reduces the proportion of childcare they provide to their own children (Presser 2003). However, where parents work distinct shifts, the amount of father childcare typically expands, thereby promoting gender equity in household production. We expect to find similar patterns among parents of infants.

Breastfeeding is mainly associated with infants, so studies of breastfeeding may shed additional light on mother time spent on childcare. Over two-thirds of all American newborns are breastfed, with the rate of exclusive breastfeeding declining to 7.9% at six months, and these rates are lowest among non-Hispanic black mothers (Li et al 2003). The resumption of full-time employment is closely related to the cessation of breastfeeding, while education and income are positively related to breastfeeding (McKinley and Hyde 2004). To the extent that breastfeeding is positively correlated with childcare time, we expect mothers to devote relatively more time to infants when the mothers are Hispanic or not African American, non-employed, or have high levels of education or income.

The welfare-to-work legislation of 1996 is also relevant to the present study because it pressures low-income, single mothers of infants to gain and maintain employment. By 2003, when ATUS data collection began, a total of 20 states had imposed work requirements on the mothers of infants (Waldfogel 2006), and these requirements may function to reduce levels of childcare time among affected mothers.

Resources, Childcare as an Investment, and Norms

Conceptually, time devoted to the care of infants is likely influenced by available financial and human resources, by the potential benefits of investing time in a child, and by social norms. In terms of resources, we might expect single mothers to spend less time on childcare than coupled mothers if they need to spend more time on employment. On the other hand, a coupled mother might rely on the father as a childcare provider, so spend less time on childcare. It seems likely that teenage girls, grandparents, or other adults living in the household might provide childcare, and hence serve to reduce the need for childcare by either parent. However, grandparents or other adults might themselves need care, so either increase or reduce the childcare time provided by a parent (Neal and Hammer 2006). Another relevant resource constraint concerns whether a family, particularly that of a single mother, lives in poverty. One premise of the 1996 welfare-to-work legislation was that single mothers would be lifted out of poverty through employment, so we might expect to see single mothers above the poverty line devoting more time to work – and less time to their children – as a result.

Folbre (2001) argues that childcare represents an investment. It is unlike other investments in that the beneficiaries are mainly the child, in later life, and the society, as the child grows and becomes productive. Indeed, motherhood is associated with substantial net lifetime reductions in assets and earnings (Crittenden 2001). However, even if investments in children are not particularly rational in the sense of self-interested behavior, the likely returns may influence the level of time invested in parental care.

Waldfogel (2006) concludes that full-time mother employment during the first year of a child's life may have negative developmental effects relative to settings where the mother is either not employed or employed part-time, while full-time employment thereafter has no discernable effects (see also Zaslow, Jekielek, and Gallagher 2005). These findings suggest that the returns on mother care for infants are higher than for older children, so mothers (and perhaps fathers) may devote more time to infants. Similarly, the paid maternity leave systems and pressures on new mothers to quit employment discussed in the introduction both imply that returns on parental time investments in infants are higher than for older children.

The investment logic also fits the empirical link between childcare time and parental education. To the extent that parents with high levels of education place a high value on human capital, they may spend more time on childcare as a human capital investment.

Norms may also play a role in determining time with infants. Some research suggests that an "ideal worker norm" now affects the middle class, leading to substantial rewards for highly educated individuals who exhibit extreme levels of commitment to managerial and professional careers (e.g., Bailyn 2006; Williams 2000). The norm implies that affected individuals will be less likely to rear children, will be more likely to delay childrearing, and may ultimately spend less time on their children due to demanding careers. Drago (2007) identifies individuals subject to the ideal worker norm and finds that this group includes relatively few African-Americans or Hispanics, suggesting that people of color continue to be largely excluded from the middle class.

In addition to the ideal worker norm, Hays (1996) argues that a norm of "intensive mothering" now pervades the middle class. That norm leads mothers to spend a great deal of time with their children, to place the children in a stream of enriching activities, and to be knowledgeable and involved with their child's schooling and social activities. The norm, as a middle class phenomenon, is consistent with the association between education, income, and breastfeeding. Further, it predicts that middle class mothers will be expected to devote more time to their infants.

Together, the ideal worker and intensive mothering norms may generate an acute conflict between the time demands of career and of parenting for middle class mothers (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007). The time allocation outcome of that conflict poses an empirical question we address below.

Of course, the term "intensive mothering" may be something of a misnomer if the expectations of childcare time have also risen for middle class fathers, as the evidence connecting educational attainment and childcare time for fathers suggests. Instead, it might be the case that a norm of "intensive parenting" has spread across the middle class. In response to this possibility, we inquire below regarding the relationship between childcare time, middle class status, and gender.

DATA

The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) was first administered in 2003, and we use data from the first four waves for the analysis.¹ The ATUS sample is drawn from Current Population Survey (CPS) respondents, and the data can be matched. The ATUS is administered approximately two to four months after the CPS and almost every day of the year. Because of the delay between the CPS and ATUS administration, variables are constructed from the ATUS

¹ Much of the information in this section is drawn from BLS/Census (2007).

whenever possible. The ATUS response rate hovers around 53%, a rate similar to that from other single-day time diary studies (e.g., see Bianchi et al. 2006:27-30).

The survey instrument is a 24-hour recall diary. Individuals are asked over the telephone to provide sequential information, beginning at four a.m. yesterday, on “what you were doing,” or primary activities, where the respondent was located, and who the respondent was with at the time. The “what you were doing” item permits estimation of primary childcare time, while time with the child can be estimated from information on who the respondent was with. However, respondents are not asked about who they were with during sleeping, grooming, working, or personal activity time, and particularly in the case of infants, the child may be present during these times, leading to underestimates of time with the child. For both primary childcare and time with child figures, we include time for any dependent children in the household.

Immediately following the primary activity question, most previous diary studies asked if the respondent was “doing anything else.” This indicator of secondary activities is used to construct measures of secondary childcare time. The ATUS does not include a direct secondary activities measure, but does ask about all times and activities when the child was “in your care,” which likely means the child is either physically present or that the adult is otherwise able to monitor the child and respond if necessary. This measure of care provides a broader indicator of childcare time and yields time estimates that are much higher than those associated with secondary activity estimates (Allard et al 2007). However, these data needs to be interpreted somewhat differently than other childcare figures. Child in care figures reported below only cover children under the age of 13 years and exclude both child and respondent sleeping time. To the extent that parents believe they should be available for emergencies or breastfeeding when an infant sleeps at night, some underestimation of childcare time is involved.² Note also that child in care time is calculated such that it is distinct from (hence additive with) primary childcare time.

In the 2003-2006 ATUS data, we located 2,172 households with infants under the age of one year at the time of survey administration and 20,895 parents of dependent children above that age but below the age of 18. Children may be biological, step, adopted, or have a foster relationship with the parent and must live in the household at least 50% of the time for a parent to be included in the sample.

In 64 cases, an infant resided in the household but the respondent is the parent of a different household child or children, so these cases are classified as involving parents of older children. In addition, only 22 single fathers of infants were identified, so they are ignored

We are also concerned about days when the parent has no contact with the child. For coupled parents, such days might occur relatively frequently when the other parent takes responsibility for the child. But for single mothers, where there is no other primary or co-primary caregiver, the inclusion of days with no contact would not help us to understand how sole care providers make time for children. Only three cases exist where a single mother of an infant had no contact on the diary day. In another 368 cases, a single mother of older children had no contact, and all 371 observations are excluded from the analysis.

Using Bianchi and colleagues’ (2006) family/gender typology, the resulting working sample of parents of infants was broken into the categories of partnered men (N=828), partnered women (N=1,025), and single women (N=228). As seems reasonable for understanding childcare arrangements, unmarried partners are classified as coupled, as are spouses living in the

² Note that respondent sleep time is excluded from ATUS estimates of child in care, because respondents themselves were inconsistent in terms of reporting child in care time while they were asleep. The exclusion remedies this inconsistency.

household.³ For parents of older children, observations are available for 7,769 coupled fathers, 8,885 coupled mothers, and 3,214 single mothers.

METHODS

The analysis proceeds in four stages. We first compare parents of infants and of older children across the three family/gender categories on childcare time. Childcare is measured as a primary activity, as time the child is in the respondent's care (limited to children under 13), and as total time with the child. Given that primary childcare captures relatively more active or involved types of childcare, we interpret high levels of primary childcare as indicative of intensive parenting. As is standard, childcare is broken into weekend and weekday figures, and figures are reported in hours per day. In addition, for coupled mothers and fathers, gender ratios of childcare are estimated across the two child age categories. The data are weighted for these analyses and those that follow.⁴

A second set of analyses addresses the time financing of primary childcare by comparing broad time use categories across the three family/gender groups for parents of infants and of older children. Although we might compare parents of infants to non-parents, that would not help us to understand whether parenting patterns diverge when an infant is involved. The ATUS includes 17 major time use categories, with sleep and primary childcare provided as subcategories. For simplicity, we combine care for non-household children with care for any adult, combine professional and personal care services, household services, and government services and civic obligations, combine socializing and leisure with sports and recreation, and combine volunteer and spiritual activities, leaving 15 categories in total. Results are presented for categories where ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses of the time devoted to that category reveal a difference at the 5% significance level or better between the behavior of parents of infants as compared to respondents with older children.

The third set of analyses provides pooled, cross-sectional correlates of parental time on the three measures of childcare for infants from OLS regressions for the three gender/family groups. Independent variables capture family and respondent characteristics. For the family, a dummy variable for a male infant is included.⁵ The total number of dependent children in the household is added to control for the fact that childcare time is measured for all children. Dummy variables to reflect family resources cover the presence of a teenage girl, a grandparent, or other adult family members (beyond a spouse or partner) in the household.⁶

For the respondent, work arrangements are proxied by a usual weekly work hours variable, coded to zero for the nonemployed, and a dummy variable for whether the reference day is also a workday.⁷ As is standard, shiftwork is constructed as involving an evening shift if most of the work on the reference day was performed between four p.m. and midnight, and as involving nightwork if working time was concentrated between midnight and eight a.m. (Presser

³ A check of the 2006 data for married and unmarried partners revealed only one male and no female same-sex couples who were also parents of infants, so the distinction is ignored here.

⁴ The appropriate weights are TU06FWGT for the 2003-2005 samples and TUFINLWGT for the 2006 data.

⁵ In 20 parent of infant cases, mixed sex twins are present, and these are classified as involving boys.

⁶ Analyses for an earlier version of this paper included controls for disabilities, infant twins, grandparent age, as well as partner employment status and usual work hours. The results for these variables were generally insignificant, so are omitted here.

⁷ Inclusion of a dummy variable for employment status did not generate significant coefficients, presumably because it is collinear with both usual hours and the workday dummy variable.

1994; Polivka forthcoming). An additional variable for other shiftwork captures respondents who worked hours mainly outside of eight a.m. to four p.m. but are not included in the evening or night shiftwork categories. Respondent age is included as a control, along with dummy variables for African American, Asian, and Hispanic race or ethnicity. Education is proxied with non-overlapping dummy variables for having a high school diploma, having at least some college or an Associate's degree, and holding at least a bachelor's degree, with less than a high school diploma serving as the control group. A dummy for the respondent holding a managerial or professional occupation, as with high levels of education, may proxy middle class status, while a weekend diary day dummy is included given that most employment time is concentrated on weekdays and that respondents may view weekends as family time.

Specification tests include comparing the OLS results to those from negative binomial (or count) and one-limit tobit regressions.⁸ Additionally, the regressions are replicated using OLS after adding three dummies for region, with the midwest region being excluded, year dummies for 2004, 2005 and 2006, a dummy variable for survey administration covering a legal holiday,⁹ and dummy variables for self-employment and for public sector employment.

The regression analyses cannot identify overall patterns, because they assume that independent variables are themselves independent of each other. The final analysis therefore identifies such patterns by dividing the parents of infants into three sub-groups: middle class parents, parents living in poverty, and those in between. Middle class status is proxied by family income of at least \$60,000 per year and the respondent holding a bachelor's degree.¹⁰ The poverty cut-off is set at \$15,000 for coupled parents and \$12,500 for single mothers.¹¹ Childcare time and characteristics are compared across the three groups, and tested for differences using OLS regressions with childcare time or characteristics as the dependent variables, and dummy variables for middle class and for poverty status as the independent variables.

RESULTS

Childcare Time

Figures for childcare time are provided in Table 1. Considering primary childcare, the most striking finding is that care time is around double or more for infants relative to older children, regardless of gender or family status and regardless of whether we consider weekdays or

⁸ OLS performs poorly in the presence of truncation, as occurs with zero childcare on the diary day. Tobit regression responds by assuming that zero values may proxy negative values of a latent variable. Negative binomial regression assumes that negative values do not exist, so is more plausible for time use analysis. Results are generally similar across the three regression methods (see discussion below), so OLS is reported because of the simplicity of interpretation.

⁹ Legal holidays include New Year's Day, Easter, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. Interviews were not performed for diary days on Thanksgiving or Christmas.

¹⁰ Managerial or professional occupations may also proxy middle class status (see Table 8). However, using that as a dividing line would exclude from middle class status any and all mothers who stay at home with an infant, so the approach seems unreasonable.

¹¹ The ATUS-CPS family income data includes cut-offs at \$10,000, \$12,500, \$15,000, and \$20,000, while the 2006 poverty cut-off for a single parent with one child is \$13,896, with a figure of \$16,277 for a couple with one child. Although we might also use the \$15,000 cut-off for single mothers, the \$12,500 figure serves to make poverty groups more comparable across the single and couple samples, given that the income needs of couples should be greater. However, altering the single mother poverty cut-off to \$15,000, or raising the middle class income cut-off from \$60,000 to \$75,000, leaves the general pattern of results unchanged. See the U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Thresholds 2006," accessed April 1, 2008, <http://www.census.gov>.

weekends. This evidence fits the claims that infants are more demanding, or that the returns on parental investments in childcare for infants are above those for older children.

Comparing weekdays and weekends, the coupled fathers spend about a half-hour more on primary childcare on weekends, while both sets of mothers devote slightly less time on the weekends. For the coupled mothers, the difference is approximately one-half hour, suggesting they trade-off primary childcare time with their partners during the weekend.

Turning to child in care time, these patterns are somewhat different. Again we find parents of infants devoting more time to childcare than parents of older children, with the exception of single mothers on weekends. However, for each gender/family category, child in care time figures are higher on weekends, presumably reflecting the fact that most parents of infants – regardless of category – are employed. Further, since primary childcare and child in care figures are additive, note that the sum is always highest on weekends.

For time with child, weekend figures are again consistently higher. The results also suggest that any gendered trade-off of weekday and weekend childcare time for coupled parents of infants is limited: compared to the coupled fathers on weekends, the coupled mothers of infants spend over two additional hours with the infants on those days. This evidence suggests that, even with any trade-off of primary childcare, weekends are predominantly viewed by coupled parents as family times, when the mother, father, and infant are mainly together.

Overall, figures for father childcare time for infants as opposed to older children suggest there has been an historical shift. In contrast to earlier findings (e.g., Wood and Repetti 2004), the ATUS data suggest that fathers are now devoting relatively more time to infants. Indeed, compared to fathers of older children, fathers spend an additional hour with infants on weekdays, and well over that time on weekend days.

Gender ratios for coupled respondents are provided in Table 2. Considering childcare for infants, the lowest ratio is for primary childcare on weekdays, when fathers provide less than 40% of the care provided by mothers, while the highest ratio is for child in care on weekends, when fathers are estimated to provide 83% of the care time provided by mothers. These findings reinforce the possibility that fathers use childcare time on weekends to make up for relative shortfalls of childcare on weekdays. More striking is the finding that the gender ratios are generally *lower* for parents of infants relative to parents of older children. Fathers may devote more time to infants, but mothers devote so much additional time that even high levels of father involvement with infants are not necessarily linked to enhanced levels of gender equity in the home. Further, in no case does the gender ratio approach, much less surpass, a figure of unity, which would represent gender equality.

Time Financing of Primary Childcare

Categories where time use patterns are significantly different for parents of infants as compared to parents of older children are reported in Table 3. For fathers, an additional three-quarters of an hour devoted to primary childcare for infants is drawn from reductions of around 20 minutes per day in housework and in sport and leisure activities, with a smaller reduction in time spent on spiritual activities and volunteer work. An examination of the time use categories behind the last two results reveals that coupled fathers are significantly reducing socializing and leisure activities, as well as volunteer time, while no significant differences in sport and recreation or in spiritual and religious activities exist.

It seems likely that some housework is performed as a secondary activity when respondents report childcare as a primary activity, though we cannot test for this possibility with

the ATUS data. A conservative approach is therefore to view the apparent reductions in housework time as questionable.

For coupled mothers, the additional two hours per day spent on primary childcare for infants is drawn from reductions in working time of over an hour per day, a reduction in sport and leisure time of around 20 minutes, and smaller reductions in the time spent on personal care, travel, spiritual and volunteer activities, and education. In contrast to the coupled fathers, a check of the more detailed time use categories reveals that the sport and leisure result is due to significantly less time devoted to sport and recreation, and not to differences in socializing and leisure time. In common with the coupled fathers, we find significant reductions in volunteer but not spiritual or religious time for the coupled mothers.

For single mothers, primary childcare time is around one-and-a-half hours longer for infants. That time is drawn from significant reductions in working time of around an hour, followed by reductions in housework, travel, spiritual and volunteer time, time spent on eating and drinking, and time caring for others. As with the coupled mothers, note that the reductions in working time are smaller than relevant increases in primary childcare time. And as held for both coupled fathers and mothers, the reductions in spiritual and volunteer time can be traced to a decline in volunteer activities. The expansion of time caring for others among single mothers of older children might, at least in some cases, flow from networks of care constructed by single mothers such that they receive childcare from other family members at some times and reciprocate by providing care to them at other times (Garey 1999). That possibility is consistent with the more frequent presence of grandparents and other adults in the households of single mothers (see Table 4).

Perhaps surprisingly, single mothers devote an additional half-hour to sleep when they are responsible for an infant. It seems plausible to suggest that the additional sleep can be attributed to the exhaustion associated with being a lone care provider for an infant. However, it is also possible that part of this additional sleeping time represents childcare where single mothers are co-sleeping with their infants and perhaps remaining in bed longer on some days in order to avoid waking the infant, or going to sleep earlier, or at other times during the day, with the infant. The ATUS provides no information on either who respondents sleep with or care time while the child is asleep, so we cannot directly address this issue. However, some crude proxies for exhaustion and co-sleeping are available.

As an indicator of exhaustion, we calculate how many parents end a sleep episode between midnight and four a.m..¹² Among the parents of infants, 12% of the coupled fathers, 31% of the coupled mothers, and 22% of the single mothers awoke at least once between midnight and four a.m., while comparable figures for the parents of older children are only 6%, 8%, and 7%, respectively. These figures suggest, though hardly prove, that parents of infants are often exhausted.

To indirectly measure co-sleeping (and perhaps exhaustion as well), we constructed the average amount of time spent sleeping between noon and seven p.m., as sleep during these hours may coincide with infant naps. For parents of infants, the coupled fathers average eight minutes, the coupled mothers eleven minutes, and the single mothers 29 minutes per day. Parents of older children average eight, eight, and 14 minutes per day, respectively. These figures are consistent with the possibility of single mothers more often engaging in co-sleeping with infants, relative to

¹² Our interpretation of the indicators for sleep interruptions and of naps during the day presume a standard work schedule among the employed, so respondents reporting shiftwork of any type are excluded from the calculations.

coupled mothers or fathers, but might also be attributed to the exhaustion associated with parenting an infant as a single mother.

Regression Results

Table 4 provides means and standard deviations of independent variables across the three gender/family groups. Many outstanding differences concern single mothers, who are more likely to have teen girls (almost 10%), as well as grandparents (over 30%), and other relatives (also over 30%) in the household. The single mothers report a slightly higher rate of employment and of usual work hours than coupled mothers, and have the highest rates of evening shiftwork, although the coupled fathers are highest for night and other shifts. The single mothers are younger and more likely to be African American, are less often Asian, and are far less likely to hold a bachelor's degree or to work in a managerial or professional occupation.

Comparing coupled fathers and mothers, the mothers are less likely to be employed, and they work less than half the usual hours of the fathers. They are also around two years younger and less often employed in a managerial or professional occupation.

For the regressions, dummy variables with only one or two positive values were dropped to improve the reliability of the estimates. Variables excluded as a result included other shiftwork for coupled mothers, and night shiftwork, other shiftwork, and the Asian variable for single mothers.

Table 5 provides regression results for coupled fathers in terms of primary care, time with child, and child in care time. Considering only coefficients that are significant at the 5% level or better, there is no evidence that fathers are more involved with boys, at least during infancy. However, fathers devote less time to primary care when either a teenage girl or a grandparent is present in the household, consistent with the resource view. They spend less time on all forms of childcare on workdays and as usual working hours increase. The shiftwork results suggest that the fathers who work an evening shift allocate more time to child in care and to time with child, while those on night shift provide more time with child. These results are consistent with the possibility that when coupled parents alternate shifts, higher levels of gender equity in childcare are achieved, although the results are hardly definitive given that we have no information on partner shiftwork arrangements. Note also that the other shift variable is related negatively to time with child, hardly a surprising result given that individuals with very long working days, such as firefighters, are included.¹³ Given that the other shift group is less than one-fifth the size of the evening and night shiftwork groups combined, it is reasonable to conclude that shiftwork effects on father childcare time are generally positive. Race effects suggest that African-American fathers devote less time to primary care and time with child, while Hispanic men provide less primary care time. The results for education and managerial/professional occupations are not strong, but weakly suggest a correlation between childcare time and high levels of education or holding a managerial or professional occupation. Note also that weekend diary days are associated with significantly elevated levels of both child in care and time with child.

Results for coupled mothers are presented in Table 6. Time with child is positively related to the number of children, as expected, while the presence of a teenage girl is negatively associated with both primary childcare and time with child, consistent with the resource perspective. Workdays are associated with lower levels of all forms of childcare, and usual work

¹³ Supporting that possibility, the 16 respondents classified as working an other shift average 14 hours of work as a primary activity on the reference day.

hours are associated with both less child in care time and time with the child. Age is positively associated with primary childcare, while African American and Hispanic coupled mothers exhibit lower levels on time with child and primary care, respectively. The coupled mothers spend less time on primary childcare on weekend days, but more on child in care on those days, suggesting that they indeed shift some primary childcare to their partners on weekends, although the relevant coefficient for coupled fathers is not significant (see Table 5).

Results for single mothers are reported in Table 7. The presence of grandparents is related to reductions in both primary childcare and time with child, consistent with the resource perspective. Usual work hours have no significant effects, although the workday coefficients are large and negative as expected. African American single mothers allocate less time to primary childcare and time with child. Other than these results, the only other significant coefficients are for primary childcare and child in care time on weekends, when single mothers seem to shift a little over one hour away from primary to child in care time.

The results of replicating the nine regressions just discussed using the negative binomial, tobit, and OLS with extended controls suggest the findings reported in Tables 5 through 7 are conservative. Ignoring the constant terms, there are 41 significant coefficients in the tables, and 39 of these retain significance (and sign) in at least two of the replication regressions. The two that lose significance are both in the primary childcare regression for coupled fathers, where coefficients for the presence of a teenage girl and of a grandparent fail to achieve significance. An additional 12 coefficients achieve significance in at least two of the replication regressions. Six of these changes relate to coupled men and primary care, wherein the number of children becomes positive, both evening and night shift coefficients are positive, as is age, holding at least a bachelor's degree, and working in a managerial/professional occupation. Also for coupled men, child in care time is negatively related to working an other shift, and time with child is negatively associated with usual work hours. For coupled mothers, usual work hours are negatively, and managerial/professional occupation positively, related to primary childcare time. Among the single mothers, the presence of an infant boy is negatively associated with primary childcare, while the presence of other family members is negatively correlated with child in care time. Excepting the unexpected result for single mothers with infant boys, the specification tests generate results that conform closely to other results reported here.

Group Analyses

Splitting the three family/gender groups into middle class, in-between, and poverty categories, yields childcare time and characteristics as detailed in Table 8. The middle class group for single mothers is too small for analysis (N=4, see the bottom of the table), so is ignored. Indeed, over half of the single mothers in the sample live in poverty,¹⁴ whereas the coupled parents are far more likely to have achieved middle class status than to live in poverty. Given these differences, we discuss results for couples before focusing on single mothers.

For primary childcare, the middle class coupled fathers report devoting significantly more time to primary childcare, as do the coupled mothers with middle class status. However, that difference for mothers is virtually mirrored by reductions in child in care time, suggesting they

¹⁴ It is possible that the single mothers living in poverty receive unreported financial resources from absentee fathers. As a crude check, marital status information was drawn from the CPS. Of 118 single mothers under the poverty line, 63 were never married, 42 left marital status blank, four were married at the time of CPS administration, and nine were separated or divorced. To the extent formal or informal child support is linked to past marriage, it follows that the single mothers are receiving few resources from fathers.

shift a given amount of childcare time from less to more active forms, a result that also fits the insignificant differences in time with child figures for middle class coupled mothers. It therefore seems plausible to conclude that a norm of intensive mothering exists within middle class families, and that it has to some extent led to intensive parenting among middle class fathers. The coupled mothers living in poverty report significantly less primary childcare time.

As predicted by the ideal worker norm, the middle class coupled mothers have significantly fewer dependent children in the household, and both the coupled mothers and fathers of middle class status are more often employed, with the mothers being employed in 70% of the cases where they have infants. These respondents also report longer usual work hours, are several years older on average than the other coupled parents (consistent with delayed childbearing), with the coupled parents living in poverty being younger than the others. The middle class coupled fathers are also less often African-American, while the coupled mothers in poverty are more likely to be African-American, both as expected, and the pattern for Hispanic ethnicity is similar. The results for managerial and professional occupations support the argument that the middle class cut-off is appropriate, since well over half of the middle class, coupled respondents report managerial and professional occupations, while very few of the poverty group do so.

The results fit the possibility that middle class adults are expected to work long hours, regardless of parental status, consistent with the ideal worker norm. Further, the norm of intensive mothering also seems to apply to middle class mothers of infants and, to a lesser extent, their partners and spouses. Taken together, the results fit the conclusion that middle class mothers are often caught between extreme expectations regarding both their careers and childrearing.

For single mothers, living in poverty is associated with expanded levels of both child in care time and time with child, and those differences amount to around two hours per day. That difference can be accounted for by divergence in employment rates and usual work hours, since the poverty group reports employment only around half as often as the other single mothers, and claims usual weekly hours about half as long as well. The single mothers living in poverty are also almost twice as often African-American compared to single mothers living above the poverty line, supporting a linkage between race, gender, carework, and poverty.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis leads us to conclude that parents of infants indeed exhibit divergent patterns of time use compared to the parents of older children, confirming that their distinct treatment here is warranted. The mothers of infants devote almost twice as much time per day to primary childcare. In contrast to findings from previous studies, we find fathers devoting far more time to the care of infants, regardless of the gender of the child, suggesting that expectations regarding involved fatherhood have become more pronounced around infants in recent decades. Both father and mother results suggest, though do not prove, that paid parental leave legislation would in large measure result in expanded parental time with infants and reduce conflicts between employment and childcare for these parents.

However, the ratio of coupled father to coupled mother childcare time tends to be lower among parents of infants than for parents of older children. Therefore, the continued relevance of gender inequality in childcare time is clear from the data.

The time financing analysis showed that, relative to parents of older children, the coupled fathers reduce the time they spend on housework and socializing and leisure, although we discount the housework results because of the manner in which the data were constructed. The coupled mothers reduce working time and time allocated to sport and recreation, personal care, travel, and education. The single mothers tend to reduce working time, housework, travel, time spent on eating and drinking, and time devoted to the care of others. In addition, each of the three groups exhibits small though significant reductions in volunteer time. That result, however, should be interpreted cautiously given that the control group represents parents of older children, who may often be volunteering for activities associated with their children (e.g., for schools or youth-oriented community groups).

Looking at the results more broadly, the pattern of working time results suggests that, among parents of infants, there are some fairly direct trade-offs. Parents generally devote less time to childcare on workdays, while the coupled mothers and fathers experience a trade-off between usual working hours and childcare time. Nonetheless, on average, it is the mothers of infants who reduce their working time relative to mothers of older children, although those reductions are by smaller amounts than the relevant increases in childcare. The fathers make no significant reduction in average working time to free up time for infant care.

The timing of work also appears to matter, with fathers who perform shiftwork often providing more childcare. Although we cannot tell the proximate cause of the shiftwork results from the data, the results are consistent with earlier findings regarding the possibility that shiftwork improves levels of gender equity in the heterosexual, two-parent home.

One of the more surprising findings regards the longer hours of sleep associated with single mothers of infants. This result may be due either to exhaustion or to co-sleeping arrangements, although we cannot identify either phenomenon directly in the ATUS data. Further research on both topics is probably warranted.

The results also suggest the importance of resources. The presence of teenage girls or of grandparents in the household is associated with significant reductions in childcare time for infants. In some of those cases, the parents may be sacrificing time with the child to provide care for a family member who is elderly, is ill, or has a disability, but on net we suspect the results are mainly due to these other family members providing childcare. Indeed, there may be networks of care involved here, particularly among the single mothers who often have other family members in residence; these mothers tend to expand the amount of time they devote to the care of others as the child grows.

Not only human but also financial resources play a distinct role in the amount of childcare that parents provide to infants. Over half of the single mothers in the sample live in poverty, and while employment can provide a way out of that state, the cost of taking that road is a substantial reduction in the time they provide to their infants. The results therefore suggest that federally mandated work requirements imposed on poor single mothers may be dramatically reducing the parental time investments that single mothers can provide to their children.

The results also support the view that norms of work and parenting are distinct for middle class parents. We found the middle exhibiting characteristics associated with the ideal worker norm. They are more often employed while parenting infants, tend to work longer hours, and frequently hold managerial and professional positions. They also tend to have fewer children and to be older, consistent with the view that the demands of the ideal worker norm often conflict with the ability to make and meet family commitments.

Further, the results fit the existence of a middle class norm of intensive mothering. The middle class mothers and, to a lesser extent, middle class fathers, spend significantly more time on primary childcare, although they seem to draw much of this time away from less involved forms of childcare. Taken together, these findings suggest that middle class mothers and many middle class fathers often face severe conflicts between the demands of careers and of parenting.

It would be easy to conclude from this discussion that reduced hours opportunities should be provided to managers and professionals in order to ameliorate these conflicts (e.g., Drago and Williams 2000). However, to the extent that norms are involved, it is possible that intensive mothering or parenting is neither entirely rational nor uniformly beneficial. For example, university faculty who receive harassing phone calls from the parents of students might view intensive parenting as causing a failure of children to achieve independence as young adults. Given that modern middle class parents place great stock in children becoming independent (Fricke 2000), that outcome may be both unintended and dysfunctional for affected children.

The possibility that norms are involved also fits the results here with respect to race and ethnicity. African-American parents, and to a lesser extent Hispanic parents, tend to spend less time on childcare than their white and Anglo counterparts. Perhaps these differences are cultural, but they might also be attributed to the fact that those groups are largely excluded from the middle class, so are less often inculcated with middle class norms around parenting.

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Table 1: Hours of Childcare and Housework Time Allocation, Parents of Infants and of Older Children, Weekday (Weekend day)

Age Youngest Child	Coupled Fathers		Coupled Mothers		Single Mothers	
	0 years	1-17 years	0 years	1-17 years	0 years	1-17 years
Primary Childcare	1.43 (1.90)	.73 (.85)	3.83 (3.31)	1.65 (1.19)	3.13 (2.80)	1.52 (1.07)
Child in care	3.65 (7.69)	3.35 (7.29)	7.68 (9.21)	5.98 (8.87)	6.45 (8.26)	5.30 (8.64)
Time with Child	4.23 (7.90)	3.12 (6.52)	9.15 (10.21)	5.58 (7.70)	7.81 (9.71)	5.22 (7.52)
Sample size	868	7769	1025	8885	228	3214

Note: Sample size is smaller for child in care time.

Source: Weighted ATUS data.

Table 2: Coupled Father/Coupled Mother Childcare Ratios

Age of Youngest Child	Weekday		Weekend	
	0 years (Infants)	1-17 years	0 years (Infants)	1-17 years
Primary Childcare	.37	.44	.57	.71
Child in care	.48	.56	.83	.82
Time with Child	.46	.56	.77	.85

Note: Figures derived from Table 1.

Table 3: Primary Activity Time, Parents of Infants and of Older Children

Age Youngest Child	Coupled Fathers		Coupled Mothers		Single Mothers	
	0 years (Infants)	1-17 years	0 years (Infants)	1-17 years	0 years (Infants)	1-17 years
Sleep	8.08	8.14	8.51	8.42	9.48**	8.77
Personal care	.55	.60	.62	.76**	.70	.85*
Housework	1.04	1.38**	2.66	2.77	1.70	2.08*
Primary childcare	1.57**	.77	3.69**	1.52	3.02**	1.39
Care for others	.12	.11	.15	.13	.04	.16**
Work	5.41	5.58	1.87	3.02**	2.31	3.43**
Education	.17	.07	.09	.17*	.40	.25
Eating & drinking	1.15	1.12	1.01	1.05	.72	.87**
Sport and leisure	3.64	3.98**	3.16	3.55**	3.73	3.80

Spiritual & volunteer	.17	.26**	.21	.32**	.10	.22**
Traveling	1.43	1.45	1.12	1.34**	.95	1.31**
Sample size	868	7769	1025	8885	228	3214

Note: Excluded categories cover consumer purchases, professional and personal care services, household services, government services and civic obligations, telephone calls, not otherwise classified. Significance tests for robust t-statistics in linear regressions with infant dummy variable.

Source: Weighted ATUS data.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 4: Independent Variables for Parents of Infants, Means

	Coupled Fathers	Coupled Mothers	Single Mothers
Infant boy	.517 (.017)	.509 (.016)	.549 (.033)
Number of children	2.04 (.038)	2.11 (.036)	2.24 (.078)
Teen girl HH	.044 (.007)	.044 (.006)	.098 (.020)
Grandparent HH	.015 (.004)	.022 (.005)	.354 (.032)
Other family in HH	.080 (.009)	.110 (.010)	.335 (.031)
Usual work hours	41.84 (.625)	16.36 (.606)	16.43 (1.222)
Workday	.670 (.016)	.294 (.014)	.332 (.031)
Evening shift	.054 (.008)	.043 (.006)	.066 (.016)
Night shift	.034 (.006)	.008 (.003)	.006 (.005)
Other shift	.016 (.004)	.001 (.001)	.004 (.004)
Age	31.77 (.244)	29.13 (.174)	24.24 (.398)
African American	.055 (.008)	.072 (.008)	.380 (.032)
Asian	.052 (.008)	.038 (.006)	.003 (.004)
Hispanic	.192 (.014)	.225 (.013)	.237 (.028)
High school graduate	.282 (.016)	.249 (.014)	.453 (.033)
Some college	.206 (.014)	.236 (.013)	.268 (.029)
At least bachelor's	.376 (.017)	.347 (.015)	.044 (.014)
Manager/Professional	.385 (.017)	.252 (.014)	.039 (.013)
Weekend diary day	.302 (.016)	.265 (.014)	.314 (.031)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Source: Weighted ATUS data.

Table 5: Childcare Regression Results for Coupled Fathers of Infants

	Primary Childcare	Child in Care	Time with Child
Infant boy	.261 (.180)	-.222 (.265)	-.244 (.276)
Number of children	.136 (.087)	.086 (.145)	.217 (.158)
Teen girl HH	-.786 (.386)*	.307 (.845)	.461 (.774)
Grandparent HH	-.861 (.439)*	.402 (1.237)	.224 (1.328)
Other family in HH	.136 (.458)	-.662 (.672)	-.257 (.786)
Usual work hours	-.016 (.008)*	-.006 (.009)	-.014 (.011)
Workday	-.759 (.266)**	-4.737 (.469)**	-4.200 (.453)**
Evening shift	.593 (.385)	2.465 (.738)**	2.113 (.677)**
Night shift	1.874 (1.324)	.851 (.565)	2.609 (1.130)*
Other shift	-.096 (.393)	-1.886 (.896)	-2.028 (.597)**
Age	.030 (.016)	-.024 (.021)	.015 (.022)
African American	-.993 (.386)**	-.065 (.809)	-2.257 (.845)**
Asian	-.435 (.259)	.536 (.731)	-.081 (.700)
Hispanic	-.597 (.228)**	.581 (.407)	.155 (.428)
High school graduate	.400 (.282)	.784 (.534)	.738 (.582)
Some college	.680 (.340)*	.792 (.571)	.954 (.602)
At least bachelor's	.609 (.324)	1.360 (.568)*	.915 (.632)
Manager/Professional	.394 (.250)	.332 (.331)	.840 (.376)*
Weekend diary day	.143 (.234)	1.442 (.435)**	1.457 (.414)**
Constant	.835 (.645)	7.301 (.972)**	6.375 (.923)**
Adjusted R ²	.144	.402	.381
Observations	827	827	827

Note: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Significance tests for t-statistics in linear regressions.

Source: Weighted ATUS data.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 6: Childcare Regression Results for Coupled Mothers of Infants

	Primary Childcare	Child in Care	Time with Child
Infant boy	.242 (.175)	-.093 (.255)	.115 (.245)
Number of children	.147 (.089)	.300 (.174)	.489 (.135)**
Teen girl HH	-1.227 (.509)*	-.248 (.870)	-1.756 (.707)**
Grandparent HH	.248 (.664)	-.254 (1.286)	-.939 (1.138)
Other family in HH	-.266 (.329)	-.485 (.562)	-.290 (.509)
Usual work hours	-.010 (.006)	-.038 (.008)**	-.036 (.009)**
Workday	-1.752 (.238)**	-3.585 (.368)**	-4.579 (.366)**
Evening shift	.280 (.334)	.518 (.654)	.895 (.595)
Night shift	.490 (1.190)	1.512 (1.426)	2.411 (1.785)
Age	.094 (.022)**	-.008 (.032)	.041 (.026)
African American	-.630 (.426)	-.542 (.600)	-2.019 (.525)**
Asian	-.155 (.384)	.069 (.609)	-.059 (.490)
Hispanic	-.892 (.230)**	-.122 (.386)	-.375 (.358)
High school graduate	.069 (.309)	.272 (.473)	.182 (.464)
Some college	.390 (.292)	-.039 (.434)	.200 (.456)

At least bachelor's	.499 (.340)	.129 (.482)	.380 (.456)
Manager/Professional	.433 (.236)	.233 (.357)	.559 (.333)
Weekend diary day	-.940 (.180)**	.743 (.256)**	.017 (.250)
Constant	1.374 (.582)*	9.154 (.925)**	9.030 (.795)**
Adjusted R ²	.211	.304	.401
Observations	1025	1025	1025

Note: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Significance tests for t-statistics in linear regressions.

Source: Weighted ATUS data.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 7: Childcare Regression Results for Single Mothers of Infants

	Primary Childcare	Child in Care	Time with Child
Infant boy	-.712 (.368)	-.032 (.533)	.317 (.523)
Number of children	.045 (.166)	-.065 (.273)	.321 (.227)
Teen girl HH	.700 (.663)	-.083 (.843)	-.390 (.866)
Grandparent HH	-1.196 (.479)*	.944 (.778)	-1.323 (.568)*
Other family in HH	-.709 (.513)	-1.296 (.714)	-1.235 (.626)*
Usual work hours	-.014 (.016)	-.014 (.017)	.004 (.020)
Workday	-2.135 (.515)**	-3.576 (.764)**	-4.888 (.756)**
Evening shift	-.338 (.534)	-1.647 (.893)	-1.512 (.849)
Age	.009 (.029)	.103 (.060)	.003 (.020)
African American	-1.400 (.523)**	-.465 (.592)	-1.536 (.580)**
Hispanic	-.628 (.565)	.790 (.701)	.300 (.630)
High school graduate	-.007 (.483)	.864 (.708)	.513 (.679)
Some college	.027 (.549)	.327 (.810)	-.000 (.692)
At least bachelor's	2.692 (2.410)	-.931 (1.326)	2.292 (1.565)
Manager/Professional	-.775 (1.350)	-.692 (1.289)	-.704 (.941)
Weekend diary day	-1.128 (.411)*	1.209 (.519)*	.408 (.518)
Constant	5.127 (1.078)**	5.626 (1.571)**	10.082 (1.339)**
Adjusted R ²	.239	.368	.461
Observations	228	228	228

Note: Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors. Significance tests for t-statistics in linear regressions.

Source: Weighted ATUS data.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 8: Class, Poverty, and Patterns of Childcare and Characteristics, Means for Middle Class, [Other], (Poverty group)

	Coupled Fathers	Coupled Mothers	Single Mothers
Primary Childcare	2.06* [1.53] (.99)	4.40** [3.58] (2.35)**	[2.97] (3.17)
Child in Care	4.91 [5.02] (4.29)	7.47** [8.37] (8.93)	[6.23] (8.14)*
Time with Child	5.79 [5.36] (4.56)	9.35 [9.62] (9.40)	[7.73] (9.42)*
Number of children	1.94 [2.09] (1.83)	1.77** [2.22] (2.26)	[2.19] (2.45)
Employed	.98** [.94] (.81)	.70** [.45] (.41)	[.67] (.34)**
Usual work hours	46.70** [41.57] (31.49)*	23.50** [13.67] (12.27)	[21.01] (9.54)**
Age	34.39** [31.22] (27.98)**	32.61** [28.24] (24.98)**	[23.98] (24.66)
African American	.02* [.06] (.10)	.05 [.06] (.16)*	[.28] (.52)**
Asian	.10* [.03] (.01)	.08** [.03] (.00)**	
Hispanic	.06** [.20] (.46)**	.08** [.27] (.35)	[.27] (.23)
Manager/Professional	.80** [.27] (.05)**	.57** [.15] (.05)**	[.06] (.01)*

Sample size	259	301	4
	[457]	[547]	[91]
	(46)	(87)	(103)

Note: Sample sizes are smaller for child in care figures. Results for Asian single mothers are not reported due to small sample size. Significance tests for robust t-statistics in linear regressions with dummy variables for middle class and for poverty groups.

Source: Weighted ATUS data.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

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