

Navigating New Norms of Involved Fatherhood: Employment, Gender Attitudes, and Father Involvement in American Families

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Background

In the traditional division of labor, men were expected to provide for their families economically as breadwinners, while women's primary responsibility was the care of children and the home. However, in recent decades, gender roles have shifted toward greater overlap of roles: women have entered the paid labor force in record numbers, while new norms of fatherhood now emphasize men's involvement with their children in addition to their traditional role of financial provider (Furstenberg 1988; Gerson 1993; Townsend 2002; Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda 2004). While much scholarly and popular interest has focused on how women have adapted to their new roles in this gender revolution, much less work has focused on men's experiences (Gerson 1993). And, in fact, many men may face great tension and conflict in attempting to fulfill their roles as both provider and involved father.

The primary tension in the "new father" role lies in the conflict of time and place: while the "new father" role requires spending time with children, the provider and good worker roles require a commitment to spending time on the job (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000; Townsend 2002). How do men navigate these contradictory roles? To what extent does employment impact men's involvement with their children? Are men with more egalitarian attitudes trading off longer work hours for more time—or more "quality" time—with their children? This study examines these questions using data from the 1997 and 2002 waves of the Child Development Supplement to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID-CDS). These data offer rich measures of father involvement, employment, and gender attitudes. In addition, the longitudinal nature of the data offers a unique opportunity to address the endogeneity of decisions about work and family life.

Literature and Contributions

Research shows that, in contrast to the wage penalty experienced by mothers, men often receive a wage premium when becoming a parent. Moreover, men typically work more hours after they become fathers (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000; Yeung, Sandberg et al. 2001), consistent with the "provider" role. Some recent studies, however, find evidence that despite this overall trend, a subgroup of men may be emerging who fit the "new father" description: younger men with more egalitarian gender attitudes who actually decrease their work hours upon becoming a parent (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000). The current study extends this line of research by exploring fathers' parenting behaviors, in order to determine whether, in fact, a cohort of more involved "new fathers" is really emerging. In addition to examining rich measures of father involvement (e.g., time diary engagement measures and responsibility), the PSID-CDS allows me to look at the impact of both employment patterns (e.g., work hours, wages) as well as attitudes toward men's and women's work and family roles.

Time use studies show some fathers sharing more equally in child care on the weekends, ostensibly when they are less constrained by employment (Yeung, Sandberg et al. 2001; Hook and Wolfe 2010). These studies do not, however, explicitly examine the gender attitudes of fathers and how they impact the relationship between employment and time with children. Nor do they tell us about other aspects of father involvement, such as responsibility. This paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining the relationship between employment and father involvement—as measured by engagement and responsibility (Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004)—and whether and how that relationship is mediated by gender attitudes. We know a great deal about women's time in the workplace and at home, but men have been largely omitted from discussions of the intersections of work and family. The current study examines the other side of this "gender coin," enhancing our understanding of contemporary work and family life of American fathers.

Research Design

Research Questions and Hypotheses. I have two primary research questions in this study. What is the relationship of father's employment on father involvement, in the cross-section? And, does this relationship vary by gender attitudes? I first examine these relationships from a cross-sectional perspective. Then, to better address the endogeneity of employment and child care decisions, I will utilize a longitudinal, fixed effects model, to test whether a change in employment is associated with a change in father involvement. I hypothesize that fathers' work hours and father involvement will be negatively related, but this will vary by gender attitudes: "new dads" will work fewer hours and be more highly involved with resident children than more traditional dads. For the longitudinal analyses, I hypothesize that "new dads" will be more responsive to changes in employment, such as by decreasing work hours and/or increasing involvement when mothers' work hours increases. They may be more likely to sacrifice their own leisure time, for example, in order to maximize child time.

Analytic Sample. The analytic sample for this study includes both the 1997 and 2002 waves of the PSID-CDS: cross-sectional analyses will focus on 1997, while longitudinal analyses will examine change between 1997 and 2002. The sample is first limited to those children who were the child of the head or wife in the main PSID file (91% of sample), in order to link the employment information in the main PSID file to the data in the CDS file. The cross-sectional sample then consists of the 1,159 children living in two-parent households and for whom information on time use and fathers' gender attitudes was available. The sample is limited to children in two-parent households since there are too few single fathers to analyze. The longitudinal sample consists of 953 of these children who additionally participated in the 2002 wave, with complete time diary and fathers' gender attitudes information.

Dependent Variables. Father involvement is the dependent variable of this analysis, which I operationalize by focusing on engagement and responsibility (Lamb 2004). I measure engagement using the child time diary. My dependent variables will include a continuous measure of total time spent with his or her father. I will also model time spent in specific types of activities, in order to differentiate between time spent in routine physical care, such as feeding, bathing, and diapering; achievement-related activities, such as reading to children and helping with homework; and play activities.

The second domain of father involvement I will examine pertains to responsibility the father takes for the care of the child. As specified by Lamb's framework, this includes activities such as scheduling doctor appointments, making decisions about the care and schooling of the child, and purchasing clothing for the child when needed (Lamb 2004). I operationalize this measure with the responsibility scale used in Hofferth (2003), which encompasses physical care, discipline, choosing activities, clothes buying, transportation, selecting doctors and making appointments, selecting child care or school, and play activities. These items will be factor analyzed to create a composite score of responsibility.

Independent variables. Employment constitutes the primary independent variable of interest in this study, and there are myriad ways to measure it. Work hours, however, will be my main focus, as it most aptly captures the time and place conflict of the nurturer and provider roles. For my first take on the analyses, I will run a simple model with a continuous measure of total work hours per week. Then I will examine the role of *relative* work hours by incorporating the mother's (if present) work hours as well. This could take the form of either a ratio of his work hours to hers, or else by including dummy variables for relative work effort, such as he works more, she works more, etc. While fathers' work hours are my focus, other aspects of employment are important and will be included as key control variables. These include wages, work schedule, and industry or occupation.

My second independent variable construct pertains to attitudes toward men's and women's work and family roles. Interchangeably calling these attitudes as "gender attitudes" for brevity's sake, I am referring to attitudes about gender roles and gender equity, including the typical attitudinal items

about mother's roles outside the home as well as less often measured attitudes about fathers' roles in the home and the value of father involvement for children. For this construct, I use the twenty-nine gender attitude items found in the household booklets completed by the primary and other caregivers, typically the mothers and fathers, respectively. A factor analysis of these items has been completed and produced four factors, including attitudes toward involved fathering, maternal employment, household division of labor, and marriage. Dummy variables were then constructed from these factors, reflecting the most traditional (lowest quartile), medium (middle two quartiles), and the most nontraditional attitudes (highest quartile).

Methods. In the cross-sectional analyses, I first regress the father involvement measures onto fathers' work hours in a stepwise fashion, followed by the incorporation of mothers' employment information and other economic information (ex. wages), followed by sociodemographic control variables, including child age and gender. I will then add the gender attitude factors into the models to see if they mediate the relationship between employment and father involvement. The longitudinal component will repeat this analysis but with a fixed effects model, to test whether a change in employment is associated with a change in father involvement.

Preliminary Results. Preliminary results suggest work hours and gender attitudes are indeed related to father involvement. Table 1 illustrates the bivariate relationship of gender attitudes, weekly work hours, and weekly time spent engaged with children. Fathers with the most nontraditional attitudes tend to spend more time per week with their child, relative to those with the most traditional attitudes. Those with the most favorable attitudes toward involved fathering also appear to work fewer hours per week than those with more traditional breadwinner attitudes. An exception to this overall pattern is marriage attitudes: those with the most traditional attitudes in this case both work more weekly hours and spend more time with children.

Preliminary regression results, shown in Table 2, affirm a significant relationship between work hours, gender attitudes, and weekly father engagement with children. Work hours are significantly negatively related to weekly time with spent with children, even when controlling for gender attitudes, maternal employment, child age, and other sociodemographic characteristics. These patterns, however, vary by attitudes toward men's and women's work and family roles.

Ongoing analyses are examining additional father involvement measures, including engagement in specific activities (play, reading, physical care, etc.) and responsibility. Fixed effects models will examine within-family change to understand how these relationships play out over time, thus side-stepping some of the endogeneity inherent in decisions about work and family time.

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Table 1. Bivariate Relationship between Attitudes, Work Hours, and Father Involvement

Attitudes	Mean weekly work hours	Mean Weekly Hours Engaged with Father
Involved fathering		
Most nontraditional	44.4	16.5
Most traditional	46.2	13.7
Maternal employment		
Most nontraditional	45.3	17.2
Most traditional	44.5	15.4
Household division of labor		
Most nontraditional	44.0	16.9
Most traditional	44.6	14.9
Marriage		
Most nontraditional	42.4	14.0
Most traditional	45.2	16.7

N=1,151

Table 2. OLS Coefficients Predicting Total Weekly Hours Child Spent Engaged with Father

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Weekly work hours	-0.06 *	-0.05 *	-0.06 *	-0.16 +
Involved fathering attitudes				
Most nontraditional	-	2.21 *	0.46	-6.76 +
Medium	-	0.95	0.14	-6.51 *
Most traditional	-	-	-	-
Household division of labor attitudes				
Most nontraditional	-	2.05 *	2.07 *	13.70 ***
Medium	-	-0.07	-0.17	6.46 *
Most traditional	-	-	-	-
Marriage attitudes				
Most nontraditional	-	-2.71 **	-3.12 **	-14.94 ***
Medium	-	-1.40 +	-1.39 +	-4.13
Most traditional	-	-	-	-
Married (0=cohabiting)	-	-	5.23 **	5.52 **
Dad age				
<30	-	-	3.37 *	3.70 **
30-34	-	-	1.57	1.81
35-39	-	-	1.20	1.25
40-44	-	-	-1.49	-1.12
45+	-	-	-	-
Education				
Less than high school	-	-	-	-
High school grad	-	-	-0.09	0.06
Some college	-	-	-0.59	-0.54
College grad or more	-	-	-0.54	-0.12
Race/Ethnicity				
White	-	-	-	-
Black	-	-	-1.46	-2.06
Other	-	-	-0.86	-0.57
Latino	-	-	0.98	0.19
Wife/partner employed	-	-	0.82	0.57
Child age				
Infant (0-1)	-	-	-	-
Preschooler (2-5)	-	-	2.22 *	2.26 *
School-aged (6-13)	-	-	-2.47 *	-2.36 *
Nontraditional involved fathering attitudes x Work hours	-	-	-	0.16 *
Medium involved fathering attitudes x Work hours	-	-	-	0.15 *
Nontraditional div of labor attitudes x Work hours	-	-	-	-0.27 ***
Medium div of labor attitudes x Work hours	-	-	-	-0.15 *
Nontraditional marriage attitudes x Work hours	-	-	-	0.27 **
Medium marriage attitudes x Work hours	-	-	-	0.06

+p<0.10 * p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

Note: Results are weighted.