DOES FATHER CARE MEAN FATHERS SHARE? A Comparison of How Mothers and Fathers in Intact Families Spend Time with Children

LYN CRAIG
University of New South Wales

*This article uses diary data from the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey (*N > *4,000) to compare by gender total child care time calculated in the measurements of (1) main activity, (2) main or secondary activity, and (3) total time spent in the company of children. It also offers an innovative gender comparison of relative time spent in (1) the activities that constitute child care, (2) child care as double activity, and (3) time with children in sole charge. These measures give a fuller picture of total time commitment to children and how men and women spend that time than has been available in previous time use analyses. The results indicate that compared to fathering, mothering involves not only more overall time commitment but more multitasking, more physical labor, a more rigid timetable, more time alone with children, and more overall responsibility for managing care. These gender differences in the quantity and nature of care apply even when women work full-time.*

Keywords: *care of children; gender; shared parenting; time use*

This article investigates whether women provide more child care than do men and whether the experience of providing care is different in kind and quality for mothers and for fathers. It goes beyond previous research into men's and women's child care time by using large-scale quantitative data from time dairies to tease out some of the dimensions on which the experience of providing parental child care may be different for men and for

---

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This material was produced with the assistance of the Office for Women, Australian Federal Department of Family and Community Services, through the Time Use Research Fellowship Scheme. The views expressed in this article are the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Office for Women or the Australian Government.*

REPRINT REQUESTS: *Lyn Craig, Social Policy Research Centre, G2, Western Campus, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia 2052*

GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 20 No. 2, April 2006 259-281
DOI: 10.1177/0891243205285212

women. To do this, it begins with a gender comparison of total child care time, measured in three increasingly comprehensive ways. Then it conducts an innovative investigation into how mothers and fathers spend the time that they are with children in relative terms, comparing the proportion of their total child care time that men and women spend in various child care tasks, in child care as double activity, and in sole charge of children. Finally, it looks at whether gender differences in the investigated measures of amount and type of child care pertain when mothers are employed full-time.

The issue of how men and women share domestic responsibilities is intertwined with one of the profound social changes of the past century: the movement of women into the paid workforce. Many expected that as a consequence of women's spending more time in paid employment, men would spend more time in domestic labor (Gershuny and Robinson 1988). But changes in the sphere of paid work have been more radical than changes in the home (Boje 1996). On average, men have only slightly increased the time they spend doing housework. Men's and women's contribution to housework has become more equal, but because women are doing much less than hitherto, not because men are doing much more (Baxter 2002; Bianchi 2004). This suggests that work that was previously done by women in the unpaid sector of the economy has either moved into the paid sector or is simply being left undone (Bianchi 2004; Bianchi et al. 2000; Himmelweit 2002).

The central concern in this regard is the care of children. Delegating the care of children is more potentially problematic than outsourcing other domestic tasks (England and Folbre 2003). Care giving is a complicated mixture of work and love, in which the relationship itself is of great importance (Folbre 2001). Previous research suggests that women may be less willing to reduce their time with children than to reduce their time in other household duties (Craig 2005). The flip side of apprehension that women will not be able to engage in market work, or will be overburdened if they try to balance work and care, is concern that if they substantially withdraw from care the welfare of children will suffer (Gornick and Meyers 2004; Hewlett, Rankin, and West 2002). Balancing the needs of children for nurture and the needs of women for independence without overloading women is the outstanding challenge of feminism: "If we move from a gender-divided society to a more equal one, then we have to go the whole way if children are to be adequately cared for" (Himmelweit 2000, 18).

Increased father involvement is widely seen as a solution to this challenge. By this means, children could receive care from someone who knows

and loves them and women could be relieved of some of the care burden. Research finds that both men and women express strongly egalitarian attitudes toward parenting (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Casper and Bianchi 2002; Gerson 2002) and that men say they want to spend more time with their children (Milkie et al. 2004; Russell 1999). We are moving toward a social ideal of father as coparent (Burgess 1997; Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda 1999; Coleman and Ganong 2004; Pleck and Pleck 1997).

A manifestation of this is gender-neutral language. The substitution of terms such as "primary carer" and "parenting" for "mother" and "mothering" opens the theoretical potential for others, including men, to join women in the care of children. However, this approach has potential pitfalls. If in fact the carers of children are mainly women, and/or if there are unequal power relations between the sexes, then making gender linguistically invisible is more obfuscatory than illuminating (Nava 1983). A risk of a gender-free conceptualization of parenting in a male-dominated society is that it would obscure actual differences and make the specific position of mothers less visible.

So to what extent is caring for children currently shared? Time use data offer the opportunity to investigate how people allocate their labor resources to paid work and family care. Most previous studies have compared father and mother care by a calculation of total amounts of time spent performing child care. Such research has found that there is a trend toward fathers caring more for children than in the past (Bianchi 2000; Bryant and Zick 1996; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001). However, mothers are also spending more time doing child care than in the past, so the actual difference between the sexes in time allocated to child care is little affected (Baxter 2002; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001). Research consistently finds that women continue to spend two to three times as much time with children as men do (Baxter 2002; Casper and Bianchi 2002; Craig and Bittman 2004). It appears that men are still far from matching women's commitment to child care in absolute terms. This has important consequences for the ability of women to allocate time to market work.

Moreover, simply adding up the total time devoted to children overlooks other important aspects of child care. One of these is that it is a very heterogeneous activity, including tasks that range from pleasant to onerous. There has been some research into the kind of care that fathers provide. Fathers have been found to be as capable as mothers of sensitive and nurturing interactions (Lamb 1997; Yeung et al. 2001); the range of tasks fathers undertake is growing (Cabrera et al. 1999); the more time a father has to care for his

children, the more likely he is to do so (Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda 1999); and a "new father" role is beginning to emerge on weekends (Yeung et al. 2001). Despite this, to date, studies have found that women spend a greater proportion of their total care time in physical care activities than men do; fathers are more likely to engage in play, talking, educational, and recreational activities than in other forms of care (Craig 2002a; Lamb 1997; Starrels 1994).

This means that even in relative terms, the time women spend caring may be more demanding than the time men spend caring. Therefore, even if fathers do spend more time with their children than in the past, they may not relieve mothers of some aspects of the work that is part of caring. Although less obvious than a gender disparity in total time commitment to children, the consequences of this for gender equity are also considerable. If the tasks that men and women undertake with their children, or the time constraints or level of management responsibility for care are different, increased father time with children may still leave mothers inadequately assisted in the challenge of balancing work and family commitments.

This problem could be exacerbated if it is unrecognized. There is evidence that fathers think their child care matches that of their wives, but mothers disagree (Milkie et al. 2002). This perception mismatch may be a result of the fact that the gender differences in how child care is performed are sometimes subtle. The ways in which caring for children is differently constituted by sex may not be well recognized even by the parents themselves and may be entirely invisible to policy makers and employers. This would mean that intrahousehold negotiations over care, and social and employment policies that affect work-family balance, are underinformed. To supply knowledge that could assist in filling this information gap, this article undertakes a more detailed and layered quantitative analysis of gender differences in child care, including some completely new measures, than has been provided by previous research. The intention is to tease out some of the ways in which the experience of providing parental child care may be different for men and for women, by providing a snapshot of time devoted to relative care of children by fathers and mothers in intact families. The article tests the hypothesis that mothers in intact families not only provide more child care in total than fathers, but that also, the experience of providing care is different in kind and quality for mothers and for fathers. It extends the research into how men and women allocate time to children beyond simple comparison of total time inputs, to investigate measures of double activity, task allocation, and time with children in sole charge. I discuss these measures and what they may indicate about relative care provision, and therefore the lived experience of mothers and fathers, below.

MEASURES

Double Activity

Capturing parental time with children is not straightforward (Budig and Folbre 2004). The simplest way of ascertaining how much time is devoted to children is by calculating the time spent in direct care as a main activity. Time committed to children goes beyond time spent in active, direct care, however. About twice as much child care is done as a simultaneous, or "secondary," activity than as a main or "primary" activity (Craig 2002b; Ironmonger 2004). Respondents to time-diaries who are in charge of children, and who undertake another activity such as shopping, much more frequently record the shopping as their main activity than the child care they are also performing. With few exceptions (Craig 2002b; Ironmonger 2004; Zick and Bryant 1996), earlier studies have excluded this simultaneous or secondary activity from the analysis of time use and children.

Including secondary activity in the estimation of child care time is important for several reasons. First, it gives a fuller account of the magnitude of time parents commit to children. If only direct active care is counted, a significant underestimation of time in child care results because child care is so often done at the same time as other activities. Including secondary activity allows calculation of both time that parents are engaged in child care and time that they are available to be called on. While the presence of children may not require activity or direct intervention, it does limit the carer's options about what else they can do and where they can go. Most obviously, it limits opportunity to engage in market work. Child care as a secondary or accompanying activity requires the parent's presence and at least part of their attention. It is time during which they cannot undertake activities where children cannot be present, unless they arrange to substitute someone else's care for their own. So counting secondary activity allows more accurate recognition of how being responsible for children acts on parents as a constraint. If there are substantial gender differences in secondary care time, it would imply that child care is not equally constraining on men and on women.

The amount of secondary activity that is included in child care also arguably affects the subjective experience of providing that care. Counting only the main task conceals how many activities are being done at once. Performing more than one work task at a time is often necessary because some jobs, such as cooking dinner and comforting a crying child, cannot be rescheduled (McMahon 1999). Assessing only primary activity leaves such

urgency and multitasking unrecorded. Also, child care activities that could be in themselves pleasant, such as talking, bathing, playing, or reading aloud, can become less so if one's attention is simultaneously being claimed by other responsibilities. Shopping and caring for children simultaneously may be fraught and difficult compared with performing each separately. Including secondary activity in the measure of parental time gives a fuller picture of the density of activity associated with children and an indication of the level of work pressure involved.

Task Allocation

Some of the child care tasks are more pleasant than others. It is arguably more fun to read to or play with your children than to change a dirty diaper. Bittman, Craig, and Folbre (2004) found that parents who use nonparental child care lower their time in physical activities but maintain their time in activities such as talking, reading, listening to, or playing with children. They suggest this strongly implies that these are the most highly valued child care activities. As mentioned above, we also know from previous research that fathers spend the bulk of their child care time in play and talking activities, while women spend proportionately more of their child care time performing physical tasks (Craig 2002a; Lamb 1997; Starrels 1994). This implies that men may enjoy a disproportionate amount of the more pleasurable aspects of caring, and women a disproportionate amount of the more demanding aspects of caring.

There is an additional implication. Some child care tasks, such as feeding, dressing, or transporting children, have to be done at certain times, while others, such as playing or reading can be performed at the parents' discretion. The tasks that have to be done on schedule are more constraining on parental time than those that do not. Research has established that there are persistent differences between men and women in the type of household tasks performed. The household work men undertake is likely to be more irregular and time flexible than that done by women. Men's domestic tasks are disproportionately those such as lawn mowing, which can be done at the man's discretion, whereas women's are typically those such as cooking, which must be done at a particular time (Baxter 2002). Activities that have to be done to schedule are more constraining than those that can be fitted in around other activities (Sullivan 1997). If this gender pattern of time allocation to housework, in which men exercise more choice than women over which tasks to perform and when to perform them, also pertains to child care, the implication is that child care responsibilities are more constraining

and time critical for women than for men. That is, it will be women who must be with the children at certain times, like the early evening feeding, bath, and bedtime, while men can choose more freely whether to be present. If the women are employed, this means that they will have to leave work at a particular time, while men may be able to stay later when required. This could have implications for promotion and career advancement.

Proportion of Total Time with Children in Sole Charge

Relatedly, there is a difference between having full responsibility for a job and giving occasional help. The role of helper is far less demanding. In many cases, men's help with domestic labor is not obligatory and routine but a matter of choice (McMahon 1999). Men may help with tasks, but the "job" remains the woman's responsibility. Even when both partners participate in an activity such as laundry, men are more likely to assist than to manage the whole job. This means the default arrangement is that the woman does it. If she cannot elicit assistance, she must do it herself (Dempsey 1997). Furthermore, women typically are assigned the role of manager of domestic responsibilities. Even in households that share housework, it is the woman who must assume the responsibility for planning and organization, which many women describe as the most onerous aspect of domestic labor (Coltrane 2000; Deutsch 2000).

Does this gender pattern also apply to parents' time with children? If so, it would mean that women are the ones who oversee, plan, and manage the care of children and that men assist with specific subtasks. To investigate this, this study adapts an indicator developed by Sullivan (1997) to investigate housework allocation. She uses time-use data to investigate whether respondents are more likely to be helping rather than taking responsibility for housework by calculating the proportion of time devoted to a particular task when alone. The more relative time in which the task is undertaken in the presence of others also doing it, the more participation in it can be regarded as auxiliary (Sullivan 1997). This article applies a similar approach to investigating parental time with children and measures the proportion of total time in the company of children that the parent is the only adult present.

There are three main implications if fathers' time with children is mainly spent in the presence of the mother. First, following Sullivan (1997), it implies that the mother is taking the major responsibility for the job of child care and the father is helping with it. Therefore, in addition to spending more time with children in total, women would also have disproportionate

responsibility for the mental labor required to plan and manage the care of children. Second, it means that the father's time is not substituting for the mother's time. She is not able to use this time for other pursuits, including paid work. Third, the father-child relationship may be weaker if the mother always mediates it or acts as gatekeeper. This may have consequences not only for equitable division of labor in intact families but also for the quality and quantity of fathers' contact with their children following divorce or separation (Burgess 1997).

METHOD

This study analyses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Time Use Survey (TUS) 1997. The unique contribution time use data make to research is to provide direct information about the private sphere, particularly by quantifying household and care work, which is largely invisible to other data collection methods (Gershuny and Sullivan 1998). Because household and care work is still unevenly distributed by gender, time use data are of particular use in illuminating women's experience.

The TUS is the most recent in a series of cross-sectional time use surveys conducted by the ABS. The survey meets the highest standard of time-diary methodology, recognized by international specialists to be the most accurate method of time data collection (Robinson and Godbey 1997). The TUS randomly samples more than 4,000 households, requiring all household members older than 15 to complete a two-day time-diary. Under Australian law, cooperation with the ABS is compulsory, and rates for full response are greater than 70 percent and, for partial response (such as there being only one diary-day completed), greater than 84 percent. Time-diaries were collected on designated days from a random sample of households at four separate periods during the calendar year (with the aim of capturing seasonal variation).

This study uses a subsample of the TUS data. Households with adults other than a marital or de facto couple were excluded, to eliminate the effect of other adults in the household possibly sharing child care. (This article treats cohabiting couples as de facto married, following the Australian government's convention.) To exclude retirees and students, the age range was restricted to those between 25 and 54 years old. Also excluded were households in which there was no child younger than 12 years old, or in which only one parent was normally resident. This left 1,450 men's and 1,476 women's diary-days on which to base the analysis.

The Australian time use surveys are unusually comprehensive and detailed.[1] The diaries ask respondents to record their activities to a detail level of five-minute time blocks. This yields an average of more than 30 episodes a day. The surveys collect extensive demographic data and provide accurate information about the start and finish time of activities, simultaneous activities, the location of activities, and the company present (ABS 1998). This level of detail facilitates a more comprehensive and reliable picture of the experience of caring for children than is possible with other large-scale quantitative national time use surveys. It provides a great deal of information on parental time with children from which a multifaceted gender comparison of time with children can be built.

I categorize child care into four broad activity groupings:

1. Interactive child care (ABS activity codes 521 and 531): Face-to-face parent-child interaction in activities teaching, helping children learn, reading, telling stories, playing games, listening to children, talking with, and reprimanding children.
2. Physical and emotional child care (ABS activity codes 511 and 512): Face-to-face parent-child interaction that revolves around physical care of children. Feeding, bathing, dressing, putting children to sleep, carrying, holding, cuddling, hugging, soothing.
3. Travel and communication (ABS activity codes 57 and 58): Travel can be associated with transportation to school, visits, sports training, music and ballet lessons, and parents and teacher nights. Travel time includes time spent waiting and meeting trains or buses. Communication (in person, by telephone, or written) includes discussions with a spouse, other family members, friends, teachers, and child workers when the conversation is about the child.
4. Passive child care (ABS activity code 54): supervising games and recreational activities such as swimming, being an adult presence for children to turn to, maintaining a safe environment, monitoring children playing outside the home, keeping an eye on sleeping children.

These activities, added together, give a measure of total daily parental child care time. In this article, total daily parental child care time is calculated in two ways. The first is by simply adding together all child care that is recorded as a main or primary activity.

However, as discussed above, the TUS asks respondents to record what they were doing as a main activity and also to record in a separate column what they were doing "at the same time." This means that, unlike many other large-scale national time use surveys, it can capture the considerable

amount of child care that is done as a secondary activity. I used this information to calculate variables of the child care activities outlined above that include time in child care whether it is recorded as a primary or as a secondary activity. These variables can also be added together to give a second, fuller, measure of total child care time. I excluded time when the secondary activity is sleep. When child care is recorded as both a primary and a secondary activity, I counted the time period only once.

The TUS offers a third way of capturing time with children. It has a column asking "with whom" a respondent is during an activity. I used this "company" information to calculate a new variable quantifying the total daily time parents are in the presence of their children and a new variable quantifying the total daily time parents are together with both their children and their spouse.

Incorporating these new variables, this article presents a gender comparison of (1) total child care as a main activity, (2) total child care as a main or secondary activity, (3) total time spent with children, (4) child care task allocation, (5) double activity, and (6) the proportion of total time with children in sole charge (that is, with their child[ren] and no other adult).

While the TUS can facilitate an unusually detailed investigation into parental time use, some limitations are inherent. Being cross sectional, it gives a snapshot of one point in time and provides no longitudinal information on respondents. The data are collected only from household members older than 15, which means that child care is seen only from the parents' perspective; there is no diary information directly from children. In families with more than one child, the relevant variables record only the total parental care time and not the time spent with each individual child. The survey does not capture time spent planning care. It records only behavior and does not indicate how respondents feel about what they do.

Analysis Plan

The article first undertakes a descriptive analysis of the time that men and women currently spend in each measure of time and children. Gender influences the allocation of time to child care, and there is a very high degree of specialization by gender. Men and women are not a homogeneous group. In particular, men and women are not equal in earnings capacity or labor force status. In this sample, 86 percent of the men are employed full-time compared to 23 percent of the women. Descriptive analysis leaves differences in social characteristics in place when showing how time with children is currently allocated.

Second, this article uses ordinary least squares regression analysis to investigate time each sex would spend in each measure were a range of demographic variables held constant. The multivariate analysis allows us to speculate on how child care would be comprised and experienced if men and women were the same in all social characteristics except gender. Of particular interest is whether, if both men and women are employed full-time, the composition of their child care time is similar or if gender differences persist. The dependent variables are the measures described above. The independent variable of interest is sex (female = 1).

The model controls demographic factors that could independently influence time performing child care. Parental child care time is associated with both the number of children and the age of the youngest child (Craig and Bittman 2004; Ironmonger 2004), so the model includes a dummy variable for the age of the youngest child (reference category 0-4) and a continuous variable for number of children in the family. The sample is limited to parents of prime working age, which are split into three dummy variables: 25 to 34 (yes = 1), 35 to 44 (the reference category), and 45 to 54 (yes = 1). Labor force status is categorized as not employed (yes = 1), employed part-time (yes = 1), and employed full-time (the reference category). Employed full-time is defined as the allocation of 37.5 or more weekly hours to market work. Weekly household income is included as a continuous variable. Since time-diary data are daily and the pattern of activities varies by day even for the same individual, there is a dummy variable for Saturday (yes = 1) and for Sunday (yes = 1). The reference category is any weekday. A dummy variable controls for the presence of a disabled household member.

In the discussion of the multivariate results below, I focus on the difference between fathers in the reference category (aged 35 to 44, employed full-time, with a youngest child younger than five, with no disabled family member, on a weekday) and mothers similar in every respect except their gender. To assist readability, I refer in the discussion to mothers and fathers, without always reiterating that the model is holding constant demographic variables to isolate the gender comparison. The model specifications can be found in Table A1 in the appendix, and the full results are available from the author on request.

RESULTS

The figures and tables presented first in this section are derived from the mean times spent by mothers and fathers in each of the measures of interest, as set out in Table A2 in the appendix. This study confirms that on average,

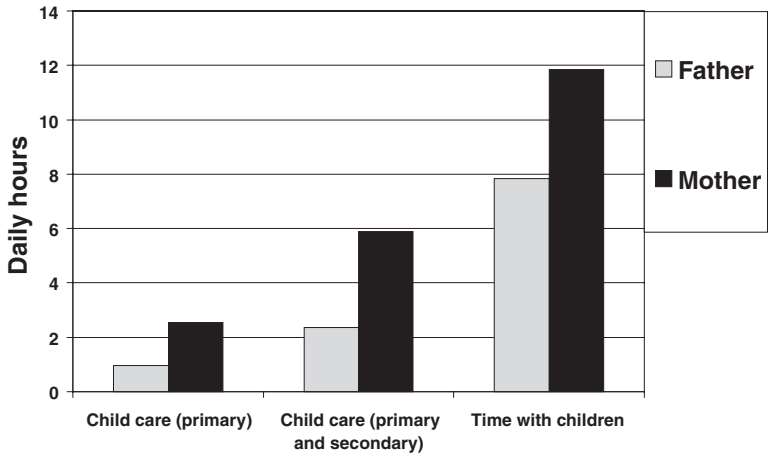

Figure 1: Total Time with Children: Mean Hours a Day by Sex
SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey 1997.

mothers spend much longer than fathers in absolute time caring for children, whether that time is calculated as a primary activity, as either a primary or a secondary activity, or as all time in the company of children (see Figure 1).

Task Allocation

There are also substantial gender differences in relative child care task allocation. The most extreme is physical care (including bathing, feeding, and dressing children), which as a primary activity accounts for more than half a woman's child care time but about a third of a man's (see Table 1). Conversely, women currently average 22 percent and men average 40 percent of their time with children in the interactive care activities of talking to, playing with, reading to, teaching, or reprimanding children.

Double Activity

Table 2 shows the proportion of mean time that each activity is conducted as a primary activity, that is, while doing nothing else at the same time. It shows a gender difference in the amount of interactive care activities of talking to, playing with, reading to, teaching, or reprimanding children that involves multitasking. Forty-nine percent of father's time in interactive care is done as a main activity. For mothers, only 34 percent of the time spent in these activities is not done at the same time as other tasks. So for about half

TABLE 1: Proportion (Percentage) of Mean Total Child Care Time in Each Child Care Task

Child Care Activity Category	*Father*	*Mother*
Interactive care	40	22
Physical and emotional care	31	51
Travel/communication	13	17
Passive care	16	10
Total	100	100

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey 1997.

TABLE 2: Proportion (Percentage) of Child Care Activities as Exclusively Primary Activity

Child Care Activity Category	*Father*	*Mother*
Interactive care	49	34
Physical and emotional care	89	90
Travel/communication	96	97
Passive care	11	08

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey 1997.

the time that men play with or talk to their children, it is the only thing they are doing. Women more often do it at the same time as other activities. As argued above, interactive care is the child care subcategory that is most valued by parents. The results imply that mothers, more often than fathers, multitask to preserve time in this valued aspect of child raising.

However, the results suggest that interactive care is the only type of child care for which this is the case. On other child care tasks, the extent of multitasking is not markedly different by sex. Both mothers and fathers perform most of their physical care and child-related travel as primary activities. Conversely, both men and women relatively rarely care passively for their children while doing nothing else at the same time (11 percent and 8 percent of men's and women's child care time, respectively).

Time Alone with Children, Time Alone Doing Child Care

The proportion of time spent performing child care tasks, and of total time with children, respectively, that parents spend in sole charge of their children are shown in Table 3. A smaller proportion of men's time engaged in child care is spent in sole charge of their children than is women's time engaged in child care. On average, 13 percent of men's child care time is

TABLE 3: Proportion (Percentage) of Mean Time with Children

	Proportion of	
	Active Child Care in Sole Charge	*All Time with Children in Sole Charge*
Father	13	8
Mother	33	29

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey 1997.

without their spouse present. In contrast, women average nearly a third of the time they care for children in sole charge. The discrepancy is present when not just active child care time but all time spent in the company of children is included in the count. Women average nearly a third of the time they are with their children in sole charge, while men average about 8 percent of the total time they spend with their children in sole charge. This means that fathers are not substituting for their wives' time, and also that men's time with children is most often mediated by the presence of the mothers. If more than 90 percent of the time fathers are with their children, mothers are also present, this suggests that men are not relieving women of responsibility for child care and that opportunities for men to experience providing full independent care to their children are limited.

Multivariate Analysis

This analysis now turns to the question of whether the differences in amount and composition of child care found in the descriptive analysis persist if men and women are similar in demographic characteristics, including labor force status. The results suggest that significant gender discrepancies in child care time allocation pertain even when demographic variables are held constant. Table 4 compares the time of fathers in the reference category with mothers, similar in every respect except gender, in each of the dependent variables: child care as a primary activity, child care as either a primary or a secondary activity, time in the subcategories of child care (as a primary or secondary activity), child care alone with children, all time with children, and time with children only. The mothers (although spending lower times in each measure than the means for all women: compare Table 4 to Table A2) spend significantly more time in every measure than equivalent fathers. This means that even if different in no other characteristic than gender, women will still spend more time caring for children and being with children than will men. More of that time will be with no other adult present.

TABLE 4: Results of Multivariate Analysis: Hours a Day Spent by Fathers and Mothers in Child Care and Child-Related Activities[a]

	Father (Constant Terms)	*Mother (Predicted Values)*
Child care as a primary activity	1.21	2.36*
Child care as a primary or secondary activity	2.46	4.97*
Child care (as a primary or secondary activity) alone with children	1.24	2.34*
Time with children	7.38	9.78*
Time with children only	1.76	3.72*
Child care activity category (as a primary or secondary activity)		
Interactive care	0.70	1.31*
Physical and emotional care	0.41	1.28*
Travel/communication	0.01	0.20*
Passive care	1.50	2.68*

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey 1997.
a. The full results of the multivariate analysis are available from the author on request.
*$p < .001$.

Mothers spend about double the time fathers with similar family circumstances and labor force status spend in child care as either a primary activity or a primary and secondary activity. Men average slightly more than an hour and ten minutes a day performing primary child care and slightly less than two and a half daily hours performing child care as either a primary or a secondary activity. Women with the identical demographic profile allocate just less than two and a half hours a day to primary child care and just less than five hours a day to child care as either a primary or a secondary activity.

Women also spend more time alone with children (that is, with no other adult present; in sole charge). In the subcategory of child care as a primary or a secondary activity that is spent alone with children, mothers spend two hours and 20 minutes of the time they are performing child care doing so alone. Fathers, similar in all other measures, spend about half that amount of child care time alone with their children.

There are similar gender discrepancies predicted for total time with children and the proportion of that time that is without other adults present. Fathers average seven hours 20 minutes a day in their children's company, and of that, about an hour and three quarters will be alone. Mothers, similar in every way except gender, average more than nine and three quarter hours a day with their children, and of that, three and three quarter hours is as the only adult present.

The gender differences in task allocation found at the descriptive level persist in the multivariate analysis. Table 4 shows time in physical care, interactive care, travel, and communication related to children and in passive care as a primary activity or a secondary activity. Mothers spend longer in every type of child care, even when all is held equal. They spend nearly an hour longer performing physical care than fathers, to a total of an hour and 20 minutes a day. This is more than three times the 25 minutes men spend. Mothers perform nearly double the interactive care of fathers. Again echoing the descriptive findings, most of this is done as a secondary activity. This reinforces the implication that women preserve time in this particularly valued type of child care by multitasking.

Mothers perform more than four times as much child-related travel and communication as fathers. This implies that the responsibility to transport children to day care or preschool, and to discuss their care with substitute carers, usually falls to mothers rather than fathers. Time in passive care, that is, supervising children without active involvement, is nearly double for women than for demographically equivalent men, showing that both that overall time commitment and time in which child care is combined with other tasks and activities is much higher for mothers than for fathers.

DISCUSSION

These results lend support to the hypothesis that mothers in intact families not only provide more absolute child care than fathers, but that also, the experience of providing care is different in kind and quality for mothers and for fathers. There is dissimilarity in the way fathers and mothers parent. What each does with children and the circumstances in which they do it are different. Gender is a predictor of different child care practice even when men and women share all other characteristics, including full-time participation in the paid work force. This implies that masculinization of women's work patterns has been matched neither by masculinization of women's care patterns nor by feminization of men's care patterns.

There are many differences in both amount and composition of care by gender that outweigh other demographic characteristics. The aspects of child care that are arguably most demanding (physical care) and the aspects of child care that research (Bittman, Craig, and Folbre 2004) suggests is most prized by parents (interactive care) are not equally experienced by men and women. Mothers do more interactive care than fathers, but it is a lower proportion of their total time in child care. Therefore, fathers enjoy relatively more play and talking time with their children than mothers do.

Mothers do more physical care than fathers in both absolute and relative terms. The child care tasks in which men mostly engage are arguably the more fun ones, which implies that paternal time with children is less like work than is maternal time.

Also, men appear to have more discretion than women over when they perform child care because they spend a greater proportion of their child care in these child care tasks, which do not need to be done to a timetable. Reading and playing do not have to be done at a certain time, whereas physical care such as providing meals and baths and putting children to bed is much less flexible. That there is a considerable gender discrepancy in this type of responsibility suggests that mothers are more time constrained by their child care duties than are fathers. The multivariate results showed that this includes women who work full-time. This suggests that women employees who balance caring responsibilities with work must do so to a stricter timetable than applies to their male counterparts. This is further suggested by the finding that time spent in child-related travel is also much higher for women, including those who work full-time, than for men, which implies that it is mainly women who are responsible for transporting children to and from nonparental care arrangements (often a very strictly timetabled event).

Fathers in intact families are relatively rarely alone with their children. This has several possible consequences. First, men do not seem to be undertaking child care in a way that relieves women of the responsibility for care and substitutes for women's time. It is an indication that expectations that men's involvement in child care could substantially free women to pursue other activities such as paid work are not being widely met and that even if women are working, they are more constrained by their child care responsibilities than men are. Also, that men typically do not substitute their child care time for their wives' implies that they are joining them as helpers in the task. This not only has consequences for the mothers who are carrying the major burden of responsibility for managing care but also has potential effects on father-child relations. If fathers are rarely alone with their children, they are not forging independent bonds with their children unmediated by the presence of the mother (Burgess 1997). This is of consequence in intact families but may also have implications for the quality of father-child contact following divorce or separation (Silverstein and Auerbach 1999). If fathers in intact families are seldom fully responsible for children, they may need to make considerable adjustments in their care patterns if children in separated families are to receive quality care from both parents.

Mothers are somewhat more likely than fathers to be doing two things at once while with children. This allows them to spend more time in certain

activities, particularly interactive care, than would be possible if they did only one thing at a time. Mothers preserve time interacting with their children by accepting greater task density, in other words, working harder than fathers.

In conclusion, this study has used large-scale time use data to investigate how caring for children in Australia is currently shared in amount and in composition. It has compared men's and women's child care along dimensions that have not been investigated by previous quantitative research. It finds that despite widespread approval of the idea of shared parenting, it has not been adopted in practice, even in relative terms. Fathers' limited care goes beyond that which could be attributed to limited time availability. The experience of parenting as a mother is not the same as parenting as a father, even for women who work full-time in the paid labor force. This study finds that the conditions of child care appear to be harder for mothers: mothering involves more double activity, more physical labor, a more rigid timetable, and more overall responsibility than fathering. That this holds true even when men and women share the same demographic profile suggests that social and employment policy makers cannot assume that masculinization of women's work patterns is concomitant with a masculinization of their care responsibilities. If the specific care experience of mothers is obscured and men's experience is presumed to apply to all, the likelihood that work-family policies will have equitable outcomes is diminished. This has potential negative implications for gender equity, mothers' workforce participation, mothers' well-being, and father-child relationships.

APPENDIX

TABLE A1: Model Specification

Variable	
Sex	Male (omitted category)
	Female (yes = 1)
Age of parent	Aged 25-34 (yes = 1)
	Aged 35-44 (omitted category)
	Aged 45-54 (yes = 1)
Employment status	Part-time (yes = 1)
	Not in the paid work force (yes = 1)
	Full-time (omitted category)
Day of the week	Saturday (yes = 1)
	Sunday (yes = 1)
	Weekday (omitted category)

(continued)

TABLE A1 (continued)

Variable	
Household income	Midpoint of ranges, yields values 0-2,300
Disabled person in household	No disabled person (omitted category) Disabled person (yes = 1)
Number of children in household	Yields values 1-4
Age of youngest child	0-4 (omitted category) 5-11 (yes = 1)

TABLE A2: Mean Parental Time (Hours a Day)

	Father		*Mother*	
	Mean	*Standard Deviation*	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*
Child care (primary)	0.97	1.35	2.55	2.21
Child care (primary and secondary)	2.37	2.90	5.89	4.30
Child care (primary and secondary) alone with children	0.43	1.27	2.24	3.00
Time with children	7.84	4.48	11.85	4.20
Child care activity category				
Primary				
Interactive care	0.36	0.66	0.55	0.75
Physical care	0.30	0.65	1.25	1.66
Travel	0.11	0.38	0.38	0.70
Passive care	0.15	0.30	0.16	0.70
Primary and secondary				
Interactive care	0.76	1.13	1.63	1.81
Physical care	0.33	0.71	1.38	1.76
Travel	0.13	0.40	0.40	1.36
Passive care	1.30	2.51	3.08	4.00

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey 1997.

NOTE

1. The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey has been described by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences as "the Mercedes of time-use surveys" (Committee on National Statistics 2000, 30).

REFERENCES

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 1998. *Time Use Survey, Australia*. Users Guide 1997, cat no. 4150. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Baxter, Janeen. 2002. Patterns of change and stability in the gender division of household labour in Australia, 1996-1997. *Journal of Sociology* 38 (4): 399-424.

Bianchi, Suzanne. 2004. Gender and time: The subtle revolution in American family life. Paper presented at the Health & Society Scholars Program, University of Pennsylvania, 1 March.

Bianchi, Suzanne M. 2000. Maternal employment and time with children: Dramatic change or surprising continuity? *Demography* 37 (4): 401-14.

Bianchi, Suzanne, Melissa Milkie, Liana Sayer, and John Robinson. 2000. Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labor. *Social Forces* 79:191-228.

Bittman, Michael, Lyn Craig, and Nancy Folbre. 2004. Packaging care: What happens when parents utilize non-parental child care. In *Family time: The social organization of care*, edited by M. Bittman and N. Folbre. London: Routledge.

Bittman, Michael, and Jocelyn Pixley. 1997. *The double life of the family.* St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Boje, Thomas. 1996. Welfare state models in comparative research: Do the models describe the reality? In *Comparative welfare systems: The Scandinavian model in a period of change*, edited by B. Greve. New York: St. Martin's.

Bryant, W. Keith, and Cathleen D. Zick. 1996. Are we investing less in the next generation? Historical trends in the time spent caring for children. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 17 (3/4): 365-91.

Budig, Michelle J., and Nancy Folbre. 2004. Activity, proximity or responsibility? Measuring parental childcare time. In *Family time: The social organisation of care*, edited by N. Folbre and M. Bittman. London: Routledge.

Burgess, Adrienne. 1997. *Fatherhood reclaimed—The making of the modern father.* London: Vermilion.

Cabrera, Natasha, and Catherine Tamis-LeMonda. 1999. Perspectives on father involvement: Research and policy. *Social policy report* 13 (2).

Cabrera, Natasha, Catherine Tamis-LeMonda, Michael Lamb, and Kimberley Boller. 1999. Measuring father involvement in the early head start evaluation: A multidimensional conceptualization. Paper presented at the National Conference on Health Statistics, Washington, DC, 2-3 August.

Casper, Lynne, and Suzanne Bianchi. 2002. *Continuity & change in the American family.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coleman, Marilyn, and Lawrence Ganong, eds. 2004. *Handbook of contemporary families: Considering the past, contemplating the future*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coltrane, Scott. 2000. Research on household labor: Modelling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (4): 1208-33.

Committee on National Statistics. 2000. *Time-use measurement and research: Report of a workshop*, edited by Michele Ver Ploeg, Joseph Altonji, Norman Bradburn, Julie DaVanzo, William Nordhaus, and Francisco Samaniego. Washington, DC: National Research Council, The National Academies Press.

Craig, Lyn. 2002a. Caring differently: A time use analysis of the type and social context of child care performed by fathers and by mothers. Social Policy Research Centre discussion paper 118, Sydney, Australia.

———. 2002b. The time cost of parenthood: An analysis of daily workload. Social Policy Research Centre discussion paper 117, Sydney, Australia.

———. 2005. Where do they find the time? An analysis of how parents shift and squeeze their time around work and childcare. Paper presented at the Conference on Time-Use and Economic Well-Being, Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, New York, 28-29 October.

Craig, Lyn, and Michael Bittman. 2004. The effect of children on adults' time-use: Analysis of the incremental time costs of children in Australia. Paper presented at Supporting Children in an International Context, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, 7-9 January.

Dempsey, Ken. 1997. *Inequalities in marriage*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Deutsch, Francine. 2000. *Halving it all: How equally shared parenting works*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

England, Paula, and Nancy Folbre. 2003. Contracting for care. In *Feminist economics today: Beyond economic man*, edited by M. Ferber and J. Nelson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Folbre, Nancy. 2001. *The invisible heart: Economics and family values*. New York: New Press.

Gershuny, Jonathan, and John P. Robinson. 1988. Historical changes in the household division of labor. *Demography* 25:537-52.

Gershuny, Jonathan, and Oriel Sullivan. 1998. The sociological use of time-use diary analysis. *European Sociological Review* 14 (1): 69-85.

Gerson, Kathleen. 2002. Moral dilemmas, moral strategies, and the transformation of gender. *Gender & Society* 16 (1): 8-28.

Gornick, Janet, and Marcia Meyers. 2004. Welfare regimes in relation to paid work and care. In *Changing life patterns in Western industrial societies*, edited by J. Z. Giele and E. Holst. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Hewlett, Sylvia Ann, Nancy Rankin, and Cornel West, eds. 2002. *Taking parenting public: The case for a new social movement*: Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Himmelweit, Susan. 2000. *Alternative rationalities, or Why do economists become parents?* Milton Keynes, UK: Open University.

———. 2002. Making visible the hidden economy: The case for gender-impact analysis of economic policy. *Feminist Economics* 8 (1): 49-70.

Ironmonger, Duncan. 2004. Bringing up Betty and Bobby: The macro time dimensions of investment in the care and nurture of children. In *Family time: The social organisation of care*, edited by M. Bittman and N. Folbre. London: Routledge.

Lamb, Michael, ed. 1997. *The role of the father in child development*. Somerset, NJ: John Wiley.

McMahon, Anthony. 1999. *Taking care of men: Sexual politics in the public mind*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Milkie, Melissa, Suzanne Bianchi, Marybeth Mattingly, and John Robinson. 2002. Gendered division of childrearing: Ideals, realities, and the relationship to parental wellbeing. *Sex Roles* 47:21-38.

Milkie, Melissa, Marybeth Mattingly, Kei Nomaguchi, Suzanne Bianchi, and John P. Robinson. 2004. The time squeeze: Parental statuses and feelings about time with children. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (3): 739-61.

Nava, Mica. 1983. From utopian to scientific feminism? Early feminist critiques of the family. In *What is to be done about the family?*, edited by L. Segal. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

Pleck, E. H., and J. H. Pleck. 1997. Fatherhood ideals in the United States. In *The role of the father in child development*, edited by M. E. Lamb. New York: John Wiley.

Robinson, John P., and Geoffrey Godbey. 1997. *Time for life: The surprising ways Americans use their time*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Russell, Graeme. 1999. *Fitting fathers into families: Men and the fatherhood role in contemporary Australia*. Canberra, Australia: Department of Family and Community Services.

Sandberg, John, and Sandra Hofferth. 2001. Changes in children's time with parents: United States, 1981-1997. *Demography* 38:423-36.

Silverstein, L. B., and C. F. Auerbach. 1999. Deconstructing the essential father. *American Psychologist* 54:397-407.

Starrels, M. 1994. Gender differences in parent-child relations. *Journal of Family Issues* 15:148-65.

Sullivan, Oriel. 1997. Time waits for no wo(man): An investigation of the gendered experience of domestic time. *Sociology* 31 (2): 221-39.

Yeung, J., J. F. Sandberg, P. Davis-Kean, and S. Hofferth. 2001. Children's time with fathers in intact families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 63 (1): 136-54.

Zick, Cathleen D., and W. Keith Bryant. 1996. A new look at parents' time spent in child care: Primary and secondary time use. *Social Science Research* 25:260-80.

Lyn Craig is a research fellow at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales. Her interests include the gendered time impacts of children, motherhood and equity, work-family balance, the division of domestic labor, and comparative family policy. In 2004-2005, she held an Office for Women Time Use Research Fellowship.