

Mothers, Fathers, Gender Role, and Time Parents Spend With Their Children

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To examine the relationships among the sex of the parent, gender role, and the time parents spend with their children, 272 parents completed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, a questionnaire about the time spent with their children, and a demographics questionnaire. Analyses indicated that neither the sex of the parent nor gender role was predictive of the amount of time parents were spending in direct interaction with or being accessible to their children. The sex of the parent, qualified by earning status, was predictive of the level of responsibility parents had for child-related activities. Further, the sex of the parent, qualified by femininity, was predictive of parental satisfaction with level of child-related responsibilities. These results emphasize the importance of examining parental characteristics in relation to the time parents spend with their children and their levels of responsibility for child-related activities.

KEY WORDS: mothers; fathers; gender role; parenting.

Estimates of the amount of time parents spend with their children have varied widely (e.g., Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985), particularly as a result of the different operational definitions of parental time involvement. One such definition categorizes the amount of time parents spend with their children by distinguishing among direct interaction, accessibility, and responsibility (McBride & Mills, 1993). Direct interaction or engagement indicates that parents are engaging in activities with their child (e.g., having a discussion). In contrast, accessibility indicates that the parent is available to the child, should the parent be needed (e.g., the child is watching television in one room while the parent is preparing dinner in another room). Responsibility describes the extent to which the parent takes responsibility for the child (Lamb, 1986) and ensures the care of the child (Lamb et al., 1985). This concept assumes that the parent is doing more than just “helping out” (Phares, 1996, p. 10).

When these definitions are utilized, a significantly different pattern emerges for mothers and fathers.

Although there is a wide variability in the amount of time parents spend with their children, mothers have been found consistently to have higher levels of involvement with regard to direct interaction, accessibility, and responsibility. Pleck (1997) further stated that fathers reported about two-fifths as much direct interaction as mothers and about two-thirds as much accessibility as mothers. Similarly, McBride and Mills (1993) found that fathers spent less time participating in activities with their children and had a lower average share of responsibility in comparison to mothers. These findings were supported by other studies, as well (e.g., Leslie, Anderson, & Branson, 1991; Peterson & Gerson, 1992). Although some researchers have concluded that fathers’ levels of engagement and accessibility were higher with young children than with adolescents (Pleck, 1997), others have made different conclusions. For example, Deutsch (1993) found that, in general, fathers of infants did very little to care for them. Despite their lower levels of overall participation with their children and adolescents, fathers viewed themselves as participating at

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much higher rates than mothers perceived them to be participating (McBride & Mills, 1993).

In addition to the differences between mothers and fathers in the amount of time they spend interacting with and being accessible to their children, several studies have documented differences in the child-related activities for which mothers and fathers take responsibility. Mothers spend more time with their children in direct physical and nonphysical care, such as engaging in specific activities (e.g., food preparation), caring for ill children, shopping for their children, and nurturing. In contrast, fathers spend more time with their children in play activities (Bonney, Kelley, & Levant, 1999; Bryant & Zick, 1996; Fish, New, & Van Cleave, 1992). Overall, these findings indicate that the distribution of parental labor continues to parallel the historical pattern, with primary responsibility remaining in the maternal domain. Although it has been documented that several variables are related to the estimates of parental involvement, few studies have examined the relationship of the amount of time parents spend with their children and parental responsibility with parental gender role characteristics. As a result, the first purpose of this study was to revisit and explore this relationship.

Although both mothers and fathers are capable of caring for a child (e.g. Silverstein, 1996), the continuing differences between the parents' levels of involvement with their children may be a product of sociocultural mandates. Sociocultural mandates may influence the mothers' and fathers' role expectations for themselves and their child's other parent (Wille, 1995). Further, Pleck (1997) suggested that a lower level of paternal involvement could be due to weak social support for involved fathers, as well as to issues such as motivation, skills, and institutional practices. Role theory, which seems to encompass these issues, provides one explanation for the differences between maternal and paternal involvement with children.

Role theory suggests that social roles are shared norms and expectations about how an individual should behave in certain situations (Coltrane, 1996; Heiss, 1981; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). According to role theory, the father's role is based on his internalized concept of appropriate paternal behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Past research, in fact, has shown that one determinant of fathers' participation in childcare is their beliefs about appropriate parenting roles for mothers and fathers. In traditional families, the lack of preparation and social support systems for new fathers often entrenches the mother as the childcare specialist. Therefore, it is not surprising that

fathers behave in accordance with maternal beliefs and expectations (Palkovitz, 1984). These different parental roles lead to different patterns of interaction between the parents and their infants (Lamb, 1977; Parke & Tinsley, 1987), children, and adolescents.

The ways in which mothers and fathers define their roles influence the quality and quantity of their behavior with their children (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993). Some women who subscribe to more traditional gender roles may not expect their child's other parent to share parental responsibilities (Bonney et al., 1999) or may not want to give up their childcare role. One way mothers restrict paternal involvement in the family work is by "gatekeeping" the domain of home and family (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Mothers who work at low paying, less prestigious, and unfulfilling jobs garner few psychological rewards or prospects for advancement. As a result, these mothers may place significant value on women's roles as wives and mothers, roles in which they may feel irreplaceable and can exercise significant autonomy and power (Lamb, 1997; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990). In support of this idea, Baruch and Barnett (1986) found that the mother's attitude toward the father's role was a stronger predictor of paternal participation patterns than was the father's own attitude. In addition, DeLuccie (1995) found that maternal attitudes toward and maternal level of satisfaction with paternal involvement were reliable predictors of the level of paternal involvement. In contrast, levels of involvement vary, but may be due primarily to emotional and practical barriers, rather than the sex of the parent, in cases where parents do not reside with their children (Stewart, 1999).

In families who espouse nontraditional gender roles, mothers are balancing and integrating their dual roles of mother and worker. In addition, fathers are becoming more invested in the caretaking role and are beginning to experience symptoms of role conflict. Barnett and Baruch (1987) found that the number of hours mothers work per week and maternal nontraditional attitudes toward the father role were the most consistent predictors of paternal participation in childcare. Further, Rane and McBride (2000) found that specific behaviors and attitudes of mothers were related significantly to paternal assessments of parental nurturing. For example, Beitel and Parke (1998) found that maternal estimates of their child's other parent's caregiving skills, interest in participating in child-related activities, and value of involvement were related to paternal involvement in childcare.

Paternal attitudes are also important. Men who were better able to cope with the major tasks of adulthood during their wives' first pregnancy spent more time with their children 5 years later (Grossman, Pollack, & Golding, 1988). Conversely, fathers who were satisfied more highly with their jobs when their first child was 5-years old spent less time with their children (Grossman et al., 1988). Further, Russell (1978) found that men with less rigid gender role orientations were more involved in the day-to-day care of their children than were more traditional "masculine" fathers. Similarly, Bonney et al. (1999) found that fathers who reported more liberal gender role ideology held more progressive views of paternal roles and that the degree to which fathers adhere to the traditional father-provider role may be related to his involvement with his children. Further, fathers who identified the nurturing role as a highly central part of their lives were more likely to participate in responsibility behaviors with their children (Rane & McBride, 2000). Men who valued the father role, rejected the biological basis of gender differences, and perceived their caregiving skills as adequate were more involved with their infants (Beitel & Parke, 1998).

Based on available research, it is reasonable to assume that the way in which parents define their roles, and the way in which they view their masculine and feminine characteristics, will influence the quality and quantity of time spent with their children. Palkovitz (1984) found that fathers' and mothers' concept of the paternal role was related positively to fathers' behavioral and affective involvement with children. Also, the involvement of androgynous fathers with their children was higher than that of masculine, feminine, and undifferentiated fathers. This finding suggests that fathers who engage in both masculine and feminine behaviors will spend significantly more time with their children.

Parental roles have changed since the early 1970s (Hood, 1986). The previous ideal of many American families, in which the father alone provides financially for the family, has become less plausible. As a result, changes in maternal and paternal involvement with their children may be related to fathers being forced to take on more active roles in their children's lives as a result of mothers entering the workforce. Gender theory is offered as an alternative explanation to role theory, discussed previously. Gender theory has three dimensions: the extent to which a woman interprets her employment as something she does to contribute to the financial support of her family, the extent to which a woman defines her job as central in her fam-

ily's experience, and who the woman thinks ideally should be the financial provider for her family. A study by Potuchek (1990) gives gender theory support. Only 15% of women in dual-income families have redefined completely breadwinning as a shared, nongendered activity, as defined by the three dimensions above (Potuchek, 1990).

Regardless of the mother's view of her employment, increased maternal employment may result in a need to redistribute the household workload between both parents. In other words, dual-earner families seem to face special challenges. There is some evidence that, with an increase in maternal employment, fathers are assuming more responsibility in childrearing and, in turn, are having more interactions with their children. Mothers, on the other hand, are decreasing their overall involvement with their children (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984). Despite the recent changes, McBride and Mills (1993) stated that mothers did significantly more, even in dual-earning families where fathers were participating more.

Other implications also must be examined. For example, Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Hutson, and McHale (1987) found that paternal involvement in parenting was associated with lower levels of love and increases in negative interactions with the child's other parent in dual-earner families. It has been suggested that men react negatively to the expectation of becoming involved in child-related activities and to the negative interactions the child's other parent may use to promote paternal involvement. This type of negative interaction does not seem to be related to the number of hours mothers are working, which has been shown to be related positively to the amount of love that fathers report toward their child's other parent (Crouter et al., 1987). Overall, these findings imply that the earner status of parents may contribute to the amount of time parents are spending with their children and with parental responsibility.

Given the many derivations of parental roles, research also needs to address parents' level of satisfaction regarding the time they spend with their children and the types of child-related activities for which they are responsible. Freysinger (1994) investigated whether leisure time spent with children was a predictor of parental satisfaction for mothers and fathers. The results demonstrated that leisure time spent with children contributed to the level of parental satisfaction only for fathers. One hypothesis for this finding is that fathers may experience more choice in their interactions with their children, whereas mothers may perceive the time they spend with their children as part

of their expected role rather than as a leisure activity. Perry-Jenkins and Crouter (1990) found support for the notion that congruence of role beliefs and the enactment of role behaviors were related to higher reports of marital satisfaction. Fathers who viewed their child's other parent's income as helpful, but primarily "icing on the cake," were satisfied with their marriage when they performed few household tasks. On the other hand, fathers who viewed their child's other parent's contributions as important to the family's financial stability were satisfied with their marriage when they performed a high number of household tasks. In general, Perry-Jenkins and Crouter (1990) concluded that just because a parent performs certain behaviors within a context of a household does not mean that he or she is accepting responsibility for that role. In contrast, Ehrenberg, Gearing-Small, Hunter, and Small (2001) found that shared parenting predicted marital satisfaction, whereas division of child care tasks did not. Such a finding also may hold true for satisfaction with parenting.

To further the understanding of these issues, we examined the relationships among the amount of time mothers and fathers spend interacting directly with and being accessible to their children, the levels of responsibility mothers and fathers take for types of child-related activities, the level of parental satisfaction reported by mothers and fathers, and the masculinity and femininity of mothers and fathers. It was expected that mothers would spend significantly more time interacting with and being accessible to their children and would report that they had higher levels of responsibility for caretaking activities than fathers. In addition, it was expected that parents who were high in masculinity would spend less time interacting with and being accessible to their children and would endorse lower levels of responsibility for caretaking activities. In contrast, it was expected that parents who were high in femininity would spend significantly more time interacting with and being accessible to their children and would report higher levels of responsibility for caretaking activities. Finally, it was expected that fathers would be more satisfied with their parenting than mothers.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred seventy-two parents (185 mothers and 87 fathers), who ranged in age from 19 to 54 years ($M = 34.03$ years, $SD = 8.22$ years), par-

ticipated in this study. One parent from each family participated. All parents who participated in this study had children who were of school age (preschool to high school). Mothers (of children $M = 7.68$ years, $SD = 5.32$ years) and fathers (of children $M = 8.86$ years, $SD = 5.82$ years) did not differ in the average age of their children, $t(df = 251) = 1.57$, *ns*. Most parents (57.3% of fathers and 73.0% of mothers) reported that their children lived with them rather than in another location (e.g., with the child's other parent). The majority of the sample was European American (77.6%). Others varied in ethnicity/racial background: 10.7% African American, 5.1% Hispanic American, 5.1% Asian American, 1.1% from other ethnic/racial backgrounds, and 0.4% of the sample did not report their ethnic/racial background.

The participants varied in marital status; 38.6% of the sample reported that they were married to their child(ren)'s other parent. The remainder of the sample was single (37.5%), separated or divorced (13.6%), widowed (8.8%), or in some other stage of a relationship with their child's other parent (1.5%). In particular, the mothers reported their marital status as single (38.2%), married (37.6%), separated or divorced (13.5%), widowed (9.6%), or in some other stage of a relationship with their child's other parent (1.1%). In contrast, fathers were most likely to be married (48.0%). The remainder of fathers reported that they were single (24.0%), separated or divorced (17.3%), widowed (8.0%), or in some other stage of a relationship with their child's other parent (2.7%).

Parents were recruited from the university community of a southeastern university. Mothers had a mean of 15.49 years of education ($SD = 1.59$ years), and fathers had a mean of 15.71 years of education ($SD = 2.75$ years). Therefore, most parents in this sample had completed course work toward a college degree. Parents varied greatly in the profession they reported. We used Hollingshead's descriptive classifications for occupation (Hollingshead, 1975). With regard to mothers' occupations, 44.9% of mothers reported that they had a profession classified in one of Hollingshead's top three categories, 26.4% reported a profession in the middle three categories, 16.9% reported a profession in the lowest three categories, and 11.8% did not provide an occupation or were not employed at the time of the study. With regard to fathers' occupations, 44% of fathers reported that they had a profession classified in one of Hollingshead's top three categories, 37.3% reported a profession in the middle three categories, 16% reported a profession in

the lowest three categories, and 2.7% did not provide an occupation or were not employed at the time of the study.

Based on the education level and occupation reported by each parent, a socioeconomic status score was calculated using Hollingshead scores for each parent. Hollingshead scores ranged from 11 to 66, with a mean score of 45.01 ($SD = 12.94$). These scores indicated that the occupations of parents in this sample ranged from positions in unskilled labor to positions in major businesses and as professionals. The average occupation consisted of a position in a medium-sized business or as a minor professional (e.g., assistants). In general, the socioeconomic status of mothers ($M = 40.71$, $SD = 10.60$) and fathers ($M = 38.92$, $SD = 9.13$) did not differ significantly, $t(df = 219) = -1.15$, *ns*.

Measures

Parental Demographics

Parents were asked to complete a demographics questionnaire that assessed their marital status, education level, and current occupation, as well as those of their child's other parent. A listing of a current occupation by each parent for themselves and their child's other parent was used to determine the number of breadwinners in the family. For example, if a current occupation was listed for each parent, the family was assigned dual-earner family status. In this sample, families had two, one, or no breadwinners.

Gender Role

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) was used to assess participants' perceptions of their own gender role. This instrument consists of 60 adjectives, 20 of which are stereotypically masculine (e.g., independent, assertive), 20 stereotypically feminine (e.g., affectionate, sensitive to the needs of others), and 20 neutral (e.g., reliable, truthful). Other researchers (e.g., Spence, 1993) have suggested that the masculinity and femininity scales are better described as measuring instrumentality and expressivity, respectively. Using a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranges from *never or almost never true* to *always or almost always true*, participants indicated how well each adjective described them. Scores are obtained for both masculinity and femininity by taking an average of the scores given to their respective adjectives. Previous research has demonstrated that the

BSRI has satisfactory test-retest reliability and internal consistency (ranging from .90 to .93 and from .80 to .86, respectively; Bem, 1974). Internal consistency for this sample also was satisfactory (.84 for masculinity and .79 for femininity). Overall, mothers ($M = 5.16$) endorsed a higher level of femininity than did fathers ($M = 4.77$), $t = -5.31$, $p < .0001$, whereas fathers ($M = 5.37$) endorsed a higher level of masculinity than did mothers ($M = 5.01$), $t = 4.00$, $p < .0001$.

Time Spent

Mothers and fathers were asked to indicate the amount of time they were spending in direct interaction with and being accessible to their own child(ren) in an average week day and in an average weekend day. These questions were posed in an open-ended format (i.e., "Think of a typical day during the work week and a typical day during the weekend. For the questions below, please estimate how much time (in minutes or hours) that you spend with your child(ren)/teen(s)."), so that each parent was allowed to estimate the exact amount of time they were spending in direct interaction with their children (e.g., talking, playing a game) and being accessible to their children (e.g., when the parent is in the same location as the child, but he or she is not engaged actively in conversation or any other type of interaction). There is evidence to suggest that time estimates of this type are reflective of actual time spent together (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Lamb, 1986). Although the average amount of time parents were spending with their children in an average weekday and an average weekend day was examined, a weighted mean of these times was calculated (i.e., weekday time was weighted by 5 and weekend day time was weighted by 2) for both direct interaction and accessibility for use in the analyses reported below.

Child-Related Responsibilities

In addition, mothers and fathers were asked to indicate how much responsibility they took for school work, discipline, caretaking, and fun activities with regard to their child(ren) in comparison to their child(ren)'s other parent (i.e., "In general, who takes *RESPONSIBILITY* for the child(ren)/teen(s) with regard to the following activities:"). For each activity, mothers and fathers were asked to rate their responsibility on a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*I do it all*) to 9 (*my child's other parent does it all*). In

Table I. Correlational Analyses for the Time Parents Spend With Their Children

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-------------------------|------|--------|------|------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. SES | — | .02 | .00 | .12 | .24** | -.15 | -.02 | .01 |
| 2. Direct time | -.07 | — | .18* | .03 | .02 | .04 | .05 | -.29** |
| 3. Accessible time | .04 | .18 | — | .01 | .03 | -.03 | .10 | .02 |
| 4. Responsibility | -.19 | .17 | -.21 | — | .34** | -.01 | -.34** | -.15* |
| 5. Satisfaction | .02 | -.18 | .13 | -.20 | — | .04 | -.10 | -.06 |
| 6. Masculinity | .14 | .15 | .17 | -.14 | .04 | — | -.08 | .01 |
| 7. Femininity | .03 | .26 | .14 | .03 | .15 | .36** | — | .11 |
| 8. Mean age of children | -.15 | -.37** | -.02 | .02 | .17 | -.05 | -.09 | — |

Note. Correlations for mothers are above the diagonal, whereas correlations for fathers are below the diagonal.

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

other words, lower scores indicate that the parent was more likely to indicate that they took more responsibility for the activity. To increase reliability, each of these scores was then averaged, which resulted in an overall responsibility score for each parent. This overall responsibility score was then used in the analyses reported below. This measure of responsibility demonstrated adequate internal consistency (.91).

Parent Satisfaction

Finally, mothers and fathers were asked to rate their satisfaction with their parenting activities on a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*completely unsatisfied*) to 9 (*completely satisfied*).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

To assess the importance of including socioeconomic status as a variable in our examination of the amount of time parents were spending in direct interaction with their children and being accessible to their children, the levels of responsibility that parents take for child-related activities, and the level of satisfaction parents experienced with regard to these activities, correlational analyses among these variables were conducted. Based on these analyses, it was determined that socioeconomic status was unrelated to the amount of time parents were spending in direct interaction with their children, the amount of time parents were spending being accessible to their children, and parental responsibility. In contrast, the relationship between socioeconomic status and the level of satisfaction parents reported with regard to their child-related responsibilities was significant, $r = .17$, $p < .01$. Because socioeconomic status was unrelated

relatively to the variables of interest in this study, with the exception of parental satisfaction, socioeconomic status was not examined in the remainder of the analyses. These correlational analyses are included in Table I.

With regard to the amount of time parents were spending with their children, mothers reported spending an average of 3.84 hr ($SD = 3.53$ hr) on an average weekday and 7.25 hr ($SD = 4.47$ hr) on an average weekend day in direct interaction with their children. Mothers also were spending an average of 4.08 hr ($SD = 3.24$ hr) on an average weekday and 7.50 hr ($SD = 5.28$ hr) on an average weekend day being accessible to their children. In contrast, fathers reported spending an average of 3.01 hr ($SD = 3.36$ hr) on an average weekday and 5.72 hr ($SD = 4.39$ hr) on an average weekend day in direct interaction with their children. Fathers also were spending 3.33 hr ($SD = 2.66$ hr) on an average weekday and 6.46 hr ($SD = 4.48$ hr) on an average weekend day being accessible to their children. Other descriptive means and standard deviations for mothers and fathers are included in Table II.

Table II. Means for Mothers and Fathers

| | Mothers | | Fathers | | <i>t</i> |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------|
| | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | |
| Socioeconomic status | 40.71 | 10.60 | 38.92 | 9.13 | -1.15 |
| Direct interaction time | 4.77 | 3.59 | 3.51 | 2.44 | -2.75** |
| Accessibility time | 5.08 | 3.52 | 4.21 | 3.00 | -1.83 |
| Responsibilities | 3.00 | 1.65 | 5.17 | 1.82 | 9.26*** |
| Satisfaction | 5.01 | 2.88 | 6.24 | 2.59 | 3.20** |
| Masculinity | 5.01 | 0.65 | 5.37 | 0.66 | 4.00*** |
| Femininity | 5.16 | 0.52 | 4.77 | 0.54 | -5.31*** |
| Mean age of children | 7.68 | 5.32 | 8.86 | 5.82 | 1.57 |

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In general, fathers ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 2.59$) rated themselves as being significantly more satisfied than did mothers ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 2.88$), $t(df = 249) = 3.20$, $p < .01$. For both mothers and fathers, parenting satisfaction was unrelated to the amount of time they were spending in direct interaction with their children on an average day. In addition, the parenting satisfaction of both mothers and fathers was unrelated to the amount of time parents were spending being accessible to their children on an average day. For mothers, parenting satisfaction was related to the level of responsibility they took for the different types of child-related activities, such as school work, $r = .23$, $p < .02$, discipline, $r = .26$, $p < .01$, caretaking, $r = .26$, $p < .01$, fun activities, $r = .24$, $p < .02$, and overall activities, $r = .34$, $p < .0001$. In contrast, the parenting satisfaction of fathers was unrelated to the types of child-related activities for which they were responsible, such as school work, $r = -.01$, *ns*, discipline, $r = .01$, *ns*, caretaking, $r = .11$, *ns*, fun activities, $r = -.06$, *ns*, and overall activities, $r = .20$, *ns*.

Overview of Analyses of Covariance

A series of 2 (mothers vs. fathers) \times 2 (high vs. low masculinity) \times 2 (high vs. low femininity) \times 2 (married or not married) \times 3 (two, one, or no breadwinners) analyses of covariance were calculated to examine differences between mothers and fathers in the amount of time they were spending in direct interaction with their children, the amount of time they were spending being accessible to their children, the types of child-related activities for which they were responsible, and the level of satisfaction experienced by each parent. Interaction terms of interest were included in the analyses of covariance. In order to make a distinction between high and low masculinity and femininity, a median split was performed on the masculinity and femininity scores independently. Those parents who scored above the value from the median split for each variable were labeled as being high, whereas parents who scored below the value from the median split were labeled as being low. In an effort to make the analyses developmentally sensitive, the mean age of the children in the household was included as a covariate. The results for the analyses of variance are presented in Tables III and IV for the amount of time parents spend with their children, in Table V for parental responsibility, and in Table VI for the level of parental satisfaction.

Table III. ANCOVA Results for the Amount of Time Parents Spend in Direct Interaction

| Source | df | Sum of squares | F |
|---------------------------------------|----|----------------|---------|
| Mean age of children | 1 | 214.82 | 21.38** |
| Sex of parent | 1 | 6.87 | 0.68 |
| Masculinity | 1 | 0.82 | 0.08 |
| Femininity | 1 | 9.32 | 0.93 |
| Marital status | 1 | 3.88 | 0.39 |
| Earner status | 2 | 12.99 | 0.65 |
| Sex \times Masculinity | 1 | 0.09 | 0.01 |
| Sex \times Femininity | 1 | 0.21 | 0.02 |
| Sex \times Marital status | 1 | 1.68 | 0.17 |
| Sex \times Earner status | 2 | 35.14 | 1.75 |
| Marital status \times Earner status | 2 | 11.53 | 0.57 |

** $p < .01$.

Time in Direct Interaction and Being Accessible

The ANCOVA for the amount of time that parents spend interacting directly with their children on an average day was significant, $F(14, 228) = 2.78$, $p < .0008$. Of the variables examined, only the covariate, the mean age of children in the household, was a significant predictor. A lower mean age of the children in the household predicted a greater amount of time spent in direct interaction. In contrast, the ANCOVA for the amount of time parents were spending being accessible to their children on an average day did not reach significance, $F(14, 227) = 1.34$, *ns*. As a result of these findings, there did not appear to be overall differences in the amount of time parents were spending in direct interaction with or being accessible to their children based on the sex of the parent, masculinity, femininity, marital status, or earner status.

Table IV. ANCOVA Results for the Amount of Time Parents Spend Being Accessible

| Source | df | Sum of squares | F |
|---------------------------------------|----|----------------|---------|
| Mean age of children | 1 | 0.27 | 0.02 |
| Sex of parent | 1 | 0.71 | 0.06 |
| Masculinity | 1 | 1.44 | 0.13 |
| Femininity | 1 | 120.10 | 10.65** |
| Marital status | 1 | 0.22 | 0.02 |
| Earner status | 2 | 15.50 | 0.69 |
| Sex \times Masculinity | 1 | 1.17 | 0.10 |
| Sex \times Femininity | 1 | 24.46 | 2.17 |
| Sex \times Marital status | 1 | 7.96 | 0.71 |
| Sex \times Earner status | 2 | 0.53 | 0.02 |
| Marital status \times Earner status | 2 | 1.64 | 0.07 |

** $p < .01$.

Table V. ANCOVA Results for Parental Responsibilities

| Source | df | Sum of squares | F |
|---------------------------------------|----|----------------|----------|
| Mean age of children | 1 | 6.01 | 2.17 |
| Sex of parent | 1 | 101.10 | 36.45*** |
| Masculinity | 1 | 0.38 | 0.14 |
| Femininity | 1 | 9.55 | 3.44 |
| Marital status | 1 | 0.03 | 0.01 |
| Earner status | 2 | 10.44 | 1.88 |
| Sex \times Masculinity | 1 | 0.01 | 0.00 |
| Sex \times Femininity | 1 | 0.33 | 0.12 |
| Sex \times Marital status | 1 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| Sex \times Earner status | 2 | 19.32 | 3.48* |
| Marital status \times Earner status | 2 | 1.78 | 0.32 |

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Parental Responsibilities

The ANCOVA for parental responsibility for child-related activities indicated that the sex of the parent, masculinity, femininity, marital status, and earner status, as well as the mean age of children in the household, accounted for a significant amount of variance, $F(14, 237) = 8.06$, $p < .0001$. In particular, there was a significant main effect for the sex of the parent ($p < .0001$). Mothers ($M = 3.00$) were significantly more likely to indicate that they were taking responsibility for child-related activities in comparison to fathers ($M = 5.17$). This finding was qualified by a significant interaction between the sex of the parent and the number of breadwinners in the family. Mothers in families with one or no breadwinners reported taking more responsibility than fathers in families with no breadwinners (all $ps < .001$). Mothers in families with two, one, and no breadwinners reported taking more responsibility than fathers in families with one breadwinner (all $ps < .001$) and fathers in families with two breadwinners (all $ps < .001$). The

covariate, the mean age of children in the household, was not significant.

Satisfaction

The ANCOVA for parental satisfaction with child-related activities indicated that the sex of the parent, masculinity, femininity, marital status, and earner status, as well as the mean age of the children in the household, accounted for a significant amount of variance, $F(14, 236) = 1.80$, $p < .04$. In particular, there was a significant main effect for the sex of the parent ($p < .001$). Fathers ($M = 6.24$) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with their role in child-related activities than were mothers ($M = 5.01$). This finding was qualified by a significant interaction between the sex of the parent and level of femininity ($p < .03$). This interaction indicated that fathers who scored higher in femininity were significantly more satisfied than mothers who scored higher in femininity. The covariate, the mean age of children in the household, was not significant.

DISCUSSION

The sex of the parent, gender role, marital status, and earner status did not predict the amount of time parents were spending in direct interaction with their children or being accessible to their children. This finding was surprising given the extensive literature that indicates that mothers tend to have higher levels of time involvement with their children (e.g., McBride & Mills, 1993; Pleck, 1997). The amounts of time parents were spending in direct interaction with their children and being accessible to their children were higher than those reported by other researchers, however (e.g., McBride & Mills, 1993). The sample of parents examined in the current study, which consisted of individuals affiliated with a university community, may be spending more time with their children because they believe that this time is important or because they may have more flexible schedules that permit more time with their children. Further, these individuals may have less traditional role theories (e.g., Coltrane, 1996; Heiss, 1981; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), which could result in this lack of difference. As a result, the similarity in the amounts of time mothers and fathers were spending with their children may be different from that seen in community parent samples. It also should be noted

Table VI. ANCOVA Results for Parental Satisfaction

| Source | df | Sum of squares | F |
|---------------------------------------|----|----------------|----------|
| Mean age of children | 1 | 0.68 | 0.09 |
| Sex of parent | 1 | 83.71 | 10.79*** |
| Masculinity | 1 | 3.06 | 0.39 |
| Femininity | 1 | 1.44 | 0.19 |
| Marital status | 1 | 18.99 | 2.45 |
| Earner status | 2 | 4.21 | 0.27 |
| Sex \times Masculinity | 1 | 0.49 | 0.06 |
| Sex \times Femininity | 1 | 39.00 | 5.03* |
| Sex \times Marital status | 1 | 5.61 | 0.72 |
| Sex \times Earner status | 2 | 37.98 | 2.45 |
| Marital status \times Earner status | 2 | 18.17 | 1.17 |

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

that the covariate, the mean age of children in the household, was related significantly to the amount of time parents reported spending in direct interaction with their children. Parents from households with younger children indicated that they were spending more time in direct interaction. After the variance from this covariate was accounted for in parents' direct interaction time, no further differences were noted.

The sex of the parent did predict the level of responsibility for child-related tasks taken by parents in our sample, however. Overall, mothers reported that they were taking more responsibility for child-related tasks than fathers. In particular, mothers reported taking more responsibility for assisting their children with school work, disciplining their children, completing caretaking activities with their children, and doing fun activities with their children. Consistently, fathers reported that their children's other parent tended to complete these activities. Thus, although mothers and fathers were not spending significantly different amounts of time with their children, mothers still reported taking more responsibility for major activities with their children. This finding was true of mothers and fathers, regardless of the earner status of the parents. These findings indicate that the historical trend of mothers taking primary responsibility for children in families has continued, even at a time when more mothers and fathers are part of dual-earning families. These findings are consistent with those of McBride and Mills (1993), who stated that mothers still do significantly more than fathers, even in dual-earning families.

Overall, the fathers in our sample were significantly more satisfied with their parenting responsibilities than the mothers were. This finding was qualified by an interaction between the sex of the parent and parental femininity. Fathers who reported higher levels of femininity were more satisfied than mothers who reported higher levels of femininity. Mothers reported that they were more likely than fathers to take responsibility for assisting with child-related tasks. Taking responsibility for these tasks was related significantly to mothers' lack of satisfaction in parenting. As a result, these findings may be consistent with those of Freysinger (1994), who indicated that leisure time with children contributed to paternal satisfaction and that fathers may experience more choice in the types of activities they do with their children. It also may be the case that fathers believed that the financial contributions of mothers were important to the functioning of their families and, therefore, they were more satis-

fied with taking responsibility for child-related activities (e.g., Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990).

The findings of this study indicated that mothers and fathers still have traditional responsibilities with regard to their children. Although mothers and fathers seem to be spending more equivalent amounts of time with their children, mothers still are taking the majority of responsibility for child-related activities. These findings have implications for the division of parental roles in families, particularly families in which both parents are working outside of the home. Women who are taking the majority of responsibility for important activities with their children and who also are working outside of the home may be exposed to higher levels of stress, parenting dissatisfaction, and relationship difficulties. If this is the case, employers should become more invested in providing helpful services to families, such as extended leave time without penalty, employer-provided child care programs, and employee assistance programs that focus on family stress. In addition, mothers and fathers in dual-earner families should be encouraged to examine their parenting responsibilities and determine what division of labor will be most beneficial for their own families. Mothers and fathers should be assisted in their efforts to balance the needs of their children with their desires to have active, fulfilling careers.

These findings must be viewed in the context of the limitations of this study. Because of its correlational nature, this study prevents us from inferring causality about the relationship of the sex of the parent and gender role to the amount of time parents spend with their children and the child-related activities for which parents are responsible. In addition, only one parent from each family participated in our study. Different findings may have been documented, and a more complete picture of family functioning may have been obtained, if both parents from each family were asked to participate in this study. Finally, the sampling used for this study places limits on its external validity because it represents both mothers and fathers who are largely educated, middle to upper-middle class participants. In future research in this area, it is suggested that a more random, community sample, including parents from various economic backgrounds, educational levels, and family situations, be recruited. It is also possible that using only self-report measures may have left the findings vulnerable to socially desirable responses.

Further investigation should determine whether such factors as the gender of the parent, personality characteristics, and/or age of the individual children

in the family could moderate the relationships among the sex of the parent, parental gender role, the time parents spend with the child, and the types of activities the parent is responsible for in that time. Researchers should continue to examine how parental marital status, earner status, and ethnicity may interact with the relationships among these variables. Although we began to examine these issues, further work needs to be done to elucidate these relationships. Such findings may provide important information about socially relevant issues, such as nontraditional parenting and dual-earner families, and the implications of such issues for the mental health of different types of families.

In summary, we examined the relationships among the sex of the parent, gender role, and the time parents spend with their children. Analyses indicated that the sex of the parent, gender role, marital status, and earner status were not predictive of the amount of time parents were spending in direct interaction with their children or being accessible to their children. The sex of the parent, qualified by earner status, was predictive differentially of the levels of responsibility parents took for child-related tasks. In particular, mothers in families with two, one, or no breadwinners were more likely to take responsibility for child-related tasks than fathers in families with different numbers of breadwinners. Finally, the sex of the parent, qualified by parental femininity, was predictive of the level of satisfaction parents experienced with regard to these tasks. Fathers, in particular fathers who were high in femininity, reported more satisfaction than mothers. These results indicate that the sex of the parent has remained a highly important factor with regard to the time parents spend with their children, parental responsibilities, and parental satisfaction.

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