Supporting Healthy Marriage

Spending Time Together:

Time Use Estimates
for Economically Disadvantaged and Nondisadvantaged
Married Couples in the
United States

Working Paper

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Abstract

A number of leading marriage and relationship education programs encourage couples to value and to understand the benefits of spending time together, as it is an important condition for a flourishing relationship. There has been some concern that poor couples may have less time and energy for each other than other couples — and less time and energy to attend relationship education programs — because of the demands they face simply to meet basic needs. Using data from the 2003 American Time Use Survey (ATUS), this paper provides the national estimates of time spent together by married parents at varying levels of income and education. The sample includes 5,729 married parents who were living together with one or more children under age 18.

Results show that economically disadvantaged couples spend slightly more, rather than less, time together than nondisadvantaged ones, and that they spend more of the time they are together in leisure activities (largely watching television). The edge in total hours with spouse vanishes in multivariate analyses controlling for differences in hours worked between low-income and other couples. Family composition and race-ethnicity also display marked associations with couple time. Couples with young children (under age 6) spend more time together, but less time alone together, than couples without young children. Black couples spend less time together than white couples, particularly after a new birth. Compared with whites, Latino couples also spend less time together, and more of the time they are together is spent with their children. The paper notes a number of implications for emerging marriage programs.

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Introduction

A central question in unfolding federal healthy marriage and relationship initiatives has been how best to adapt marriage and relationship education programs to respond to the distinctive relationship needs and learning styles of economically disadvantaged couples. Limited basic research on disadvantaged couples has made it difficult to answer this question (Fein et al., 2003). Knowledge about disadvantaged married couples is weaker than it is about unwed parents, who have been the subject of an extensive research program in recent years.[1]

This paper assesses how one important marriage outcome — couple time, or the amount of time married individuals spend with their spouses — varies with economic status. Time spent together is necessary for communicating, maintaining intimacy, providing support, and sharing activities that deepen relationship satisfaction and commitment. Thus, in general, relationship quality should increase as couples spend more time together.

Based on that assumption, a number of leading marriage and relationship education curricula seek to help couples make time to work out issues and enjoy each other's company. Should programs for disadvantaged couples put more emphasis on this topic? Should programs anticipate that such couples have more difficulty finding quality time because they face more demands on their time and greater stress associated with these demands? Is there a difference between the amount of time husbands are able to give to a relationship and the amount of time wives are able to give? If so, how might curricula address these issues?

As well as providing an important indicator of relationship health, couple time may affect couples' ability to attend marriage and relationship education classes together. If meeting basic needs and holding nontraditional work schedules take up a disproportionate amount of disadvantaged couples' time and energy, they may have little time for or interest in relationship enhancement activities. For those who do participate, there is concern that time and circumstances at home may not be conducive to practicing new skills — implying a greater need to create practice time during marriage and relationship education classes.

More generally, a supposed shortage of quality time for couples — time during which couples might engage with one another in meaningful, relaxing, or enjoyable activities — has become a major concern in social science research, clinical practices, and popular discourse on American family life. Much discussion has focused on the negative aspects of dual-earner households, a 24-7 economy, and technologies supporting increased multitasking (Schor, 1992; Presser, 2003). Research on work-family conflict has begun to delineate how competing demands can affect the quality, as well as the amount, of time couples spend together (Allen et al., 2000; Matthews et al., 1996; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000).

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[1]See www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu.

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Little is known about how much time married couples spend together, the factors influencing couple time, and whether trends have been favorable or unfavorable for married couples. Contrary to the popular view, recent estimates show that leisure time has increased slightly among married adults and adults overall (Aguiar and Hurst, 2006) and that, rather than declining, the amount of time couples (married and unmarried) spend together actually has increased slightly in recent decades (Fisher et al., 2006). Estimates are not available specifically for married couples overall, or for married couples at varying levels of economic status and other characteristics.

This paper provides the first detailed analyses of time use by economically disadvantaged married parents. Data are from the 2003 American Time Use Survey (ATUS), a rich new data source documenting how Americans spend their time and with whom they spend it. The analysis focuses, first, on the amount and uses of time spent with a spouse among couples at varying education and income levels. Next, the paper examines differences in the amount of time married fathers and mothers spend on different activities, at different income and educational levels. A final set of analyses explores the demographic characteristics and competing demands associated with the number of hours married parents spend together in an average day overall, as a couple alone, and in leisure activities.

Results show that economically disadvantaged couples spend slightly more time together than nondisadvantaged ones, and that they spend more of the time they are together in leisure activities (largely watching television). The edge in total hours with a spouse vanishes with controls for differences in hours worked between low-income and other couples. Family composition and race-ethnicity also display marked associations with couple time. Couples with young children (under age 6) spend more time together, but less time alone together, than couples without young children. Minority, especially black, couples spend less time together than white couples, and Latino couples spend slightly less of the time they are together being alone together. The paper's conclusion notes implications for emerging marriage programs.

Literature Review

To place the analyses in context, this section reviews the literature on couple time and marital quality and summarizes existing estimates and correlates of couple time.

Couple Time and Marital Outcomes

Two studies of the relationship between couple time and marital stability focus on different kinds of couple time. Hill (1988) found that higher amounts of shared leisure were associated with a strongly reduced probability of splitting up in analyses of 280 married couples interviewed in the 1975-1981 Time Use Longitudinal Panel Study. Presser (2000) found a

similar effect for greater amounts of time spent as a couple alone in analyses of 3,476 married couples in the National Survey of Families and Households.

Although both of these studies were prospective, neither established the degree to which couple time may be a cause of marital stability, rather than a consequence of relationship strengths associated with stability. Hill partly addresses such selection bias by controlling for the initial level of marital satisfaction. She finds a fairly large effect: A one-standard deviation decrease in couple leisure time is associated with a doubling of the probability of marital break-up. For specific leisure activities, she finds marital stability to be associated positively with shared recreation (such as outings) and, to a lesser degree, shared television time, but not with couple time spent socializing, undertaking organizational activities (such as church or civic meetings), or participating in nontelevision passive leisure activities, such as reading and relaxing.

Analyses relating couple time to marital satisfaction are somewhat older and also have tended to focus on shared leisure (Orthner, 1975; Snyder, 1979), although two other studies considered a broader range of joint activities (Kingston and Nock, 1987; White, 1983). Kingston and Nock report modest positive associations with marital satisfaction for time spent talking (husbands and wives) and having fun and eating meals together (husbands only), but not for time spent together caring for children, doing housework, watching television, or undertaking organizational activities. Using a multidimensional index of the frequency with which couples report doing various things together (leisure and nonleisure) and an instrumental variables approach, White finds that the quantity of interaction affects marital happiness but also that happiness affects interaction.

Karney et al. (2003) provide descriptive analyses of the relationship between couple time and satisfaction for a sample of Florida adults in romantic relationships. The most satisfied couples in their sample report spending about 50 percent more waking hours with each other than the least satisfied couples. This ratio varies little across income or race-ethnicity groups.

In sum, the proposition that couple time matters for marital outcomes has received some support. There are indications that certain forms of leisure may be more important than others, and that spending time in leisure generally, and as a couple alone, may be beneficial. There do not, however, appear to be strong grounds for asserting that spending time alone is more beneficial than spending time with others, such as children. Unexplored also is the possibility of cultural variability in the meaning, and thus the consequences, of couple time. In cultural niches where the norm is for couples to share housework or spend time with children or extended family members, for example, there may be less benefit to shared leisure and couple alone time. There appear to have been no studies of how the effects of couple time on marital outcomes vary by ethnicity and other aspects of culture.

Estimates of Couple Time

Existing estimates of couple time also are quite limited. Kingston and Nock (1987) provide some estimates based on data from the 1975-1981 Time Use Longitudinal Panel Study. They report that, at 3.2 hours per day, dual-earner married couples averaged .6 fewer hours together per day than single-earner couples. In both groups, watching television accounted for the largest share of couple time (about an hour), followed by eating meals, having fun, and homemaking (with roughly similar 30- to 60-minute shares).

The best evidence on trends is a recent study of data from several national time use surveys estimating how couple time changed between 1965 and 2003 (Fisher et al., 2006). Findings demonstrate remarkable stability in couple time. Measured for a sample that combines cohabiting and married couples, estimates show a small increase in the average time couples spend together daily — from 4.1 hours to 4.5 hours.

Analyzing changes in a different measure of couple time between 1980 and 2000, Amato et al. (2003) find a decline, rather than an increase. They find a decline of one-third standard deviation in an index of marital interaction, which averages the frequency with which married persons report eating, shopping, visiting friends, or engaging in recreation together. The exact explanation for the discrepancy between this and Fisher et al.'s finding of increased couple time is unclear, though differences in definition are a likely source. Whereas Fisher et al. count any time spent together, Amato et al.'s index is based on reports of doing several specific things together.

Influences on Couple Time

Of the factors potentially associated with couple time, the effects of income, education, and other indicators of economic disadvantage are most relevant to U.S. marriage policies. Differences in couple time across other characteristics that may be related to economic disadvantage also are of interest. Below, we discuss the hypotheses and existing evidence on the various factors.

Economic Disadvantage

Simple statistics comparing time use by disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged couples provide useful information about the types of couples targeted in federal marriage and relationship education programs. Comparisons that adjust for other factors help to understand the sources of any overall differences.

There has been little recent production of descriptive statistics on social class differences in the time married couples spend together. Karney et al. (2003) provide estimates for all Florida couples in any kind of romantic relationship (dating, cohabiting, or married), showing

that low-income couples reported spending about 15 percent more time together per week than high-income couples. Several multivariate analyses have examined the relationship between couple time and economic status and other factors, however. Kingston and Nock (1987) hypothesize that more sex-segregated roles and activities and a weaker commitment to the companionate model of marriage — a model based on egalitarianism, friendship, and trust — will result in working-class couples spending less time together than middle-class couples. Their results for a sample of dual-earner married couples do not support this hypothesis: Controlling for hours worked and several family life cycle indicators, neither income nor an index of "economic prestige" were associated positively with couple time. To the contrary, couple time declines with increasing economic status. In particular, higher-status couples are less likely to spend time together in service and organizational activities (including religious activities) and watching television than lower-status couples. Amato et al. (2003) also do not find clear signs that higher-status couples spend more quality time together. Their index of marital interaction is lower among couples with higher levels of education, but higher among those reporting improved family finances, after controlling for employment and other characteristics. Finally, analyzing data from a telephone survey of 497 married individuals in northeastern Ohio, Roxburgh (2006) finds no significant association between an index of perceived pressures on couple time and income or education, after controlling for work and demographic characteristics.

Life Cycle and Other Demographic Characteristics

A variety of life and family circumstances may affect the amount of time married couples spend together and what they do with the time they spend together. To the degree that disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged couples differ on these characteristics, we can expect differences in couple time by economic status.

Couples with more children, especially infants and toddlers, are likely to have less time to be alone together and less time for joint leisure. In Kingston and Nock's (1987) analysis, the number of children has no effects on overall couple time, or on time spent with spouse in specific activities. The presence of preschool children increases time couples spend doing things with children but has no effect on couple time overall. Amato et al. (2003) find both preschool and school-aged children associated with less marital interaction. Roxburgh (2006) finds no relationship between preschool children and perceived couple time pressure in her sample.

Marital satisfaction declines with increasing age and marital duration, raising the question of whether couple time decreases over the life cycle of marriages. The hypothesis that it does is supported for marital duration in Amato et al.'s analysis, but Kingston and Nock find that couple time increases with duration of marriage, and Roxburgh finds no association. None of these studies finds age differences, after controlling for marital duration.

Cultural norms also may lead to differences in patterns of time use in different racial and ethnic groups. Amato et al. (2003) find significantly less marital interaction among African-American couples, and slightly but insignificantly more interaction among Hispanic couples, compared with non-Hispanic white couples, after controlling for a variety of other factors. There is some qualitative evidence that, for Latinos, norms supporting strong identification with family de-emphasize couple time in favor of family time, such that Latino couples are more likely than other groups to spend time with others and less likely to spend time alone (Skogrand et al., 2006).

Community characteristics also may affect the amount and uses of couple time. Couples in more urban areas may have greater and more varied social and recreational opportunities than couples in more rural areas. Having more such opportunities might imply either more activities competing for couples' time, especially time alone, or more opportunities for joint leisure. None of the couple time studies reviewed assessed community-level influences.

Work and Other Competing Demands on Time

A variety of roles and responsibilities potentially compete with couple time and shape the way couples use the time they spend together. To the degree that competing demands differ by economic status, they also may contribute to status differences in amounts and uses of couple time.

Market employment is perhaps the strongest potential competing demand, since spouses typically work apart, and work schedules generally are less flexible than family schedules. The effects on couple time of different amounts of work thus depend largely on how couples allocate their remaining time.

Previous research has analyzed the association of various aspects of work hours and schedules with couple time. Kingston and Nock found, in dual-earner couples, that both the total amount of work and the degree to which spouses worked different schedules had negative associations with couple time. Amato et al. found that marital interaction was lower when wives' jobs entailed more work hours or nonstandard time demands (for example, irregular hours or shift work), but was not affected by husbands' work hours or demands. Roxburgh found that both husbands and wives felt more pressure on their time as a couple when they worked more and had less control over what they did in their jobs. Other analyses show that lower socioeconomic status (reflected in education and occupations) is associated strongly with an increased likelihood of having a nonstandard work schedule (Presser, 1995).

Time demands of nonmarket work responsibilities also can compete with couple time and may vary by socioeconomic status. Unlike most paid jobs, housework and child care can be organized so that couples attend to the demands of such activities together. Thus, effects of such

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demands on couple time are determined by the degree to which they are done jointly, as well as how couples spend the time when they are not doing these activities.

Findings in Amato et al. suggest that the effects of time spent on housework are gender-specific. As husbands assume a greater share of housework, Amato et al. find that marital interaction increases substantially. Roxburgh finds that men who do more housework are less likely to report feeling that their couple time is pressured, but that wives become more likely to report couple time pressures as their housework hours increase. These results may mean that when husbands do housework, they are more likely to be working alongside their wives, whereas wives' housework is more likely to be done without a spouse — and thus comes at the expense of couple time. The effects of time spent with children on couple time also seem likely to differ by child's gender, though this review uncovered no evidence on this point.

In sum, evidence from older studies suggests that married couples who spend more time together tend to have better marriages, with causation in both directions. Earlier correlational studies show that the amount and nature of couple time vary with life cycle, demographic characteristics, and competing activities. More recent research on the amounts, uses, and correlates of couple time is scanty. The advent of a federal healthy marriage and relationship initiative targeting disadvantaged populations raises a variety of questions about the ways relationships vary across the economic spectrum.

Methods

Analyses in this paper use data from the 2003 American Time Use Survey (ATUS), a data collection program recently developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau. The following sections describe the paper's use of ATUS data to analyze a key dimension of marital quality.

Data

Starting in 2003, the ongoing ATUS collects time diaries for designated days from a stratified subsample of households exiting the Current Population Survey (CPS) sample each month. From each household, interviewers randomly select one individual aged 15 or older to provide the time diary. Interviews are scheduled to occur on different days throughout the year and generate equal samples of weekday and weekend observations.

The ATUS time diary is obtained during a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview that walks respondents sequentially through each activity they did over a 24-hour period beginning at 4:00 a.m. the previous day. For each activity spell, the interview ascertains activity details, beginning and ending times, others who were with the respondent at the time, the place the

activity occurred, and any secondary activities that also may have been going on. "Who" questions are not asked for the following activities: work, sleep, and personal grooming. ATUS interviews also update the CPS household roster and a limited set of other CPS demographic and economic (chiefly employment-related) variables. Methodological research indicates that this method provides highly accurate estimates of time use (Fisher et al., 2006).

Due to survey fatigue, the ATUS response rate is somewhat lower (58 percent) than that for CPS.[2] Weights adjust for disproportionate sampling and nonresponse, resulting in estimates of time use representing an average day of the year.[3]

Analyses here are based on the subset of ATUS respondents who were married, living with one or more of their minor children (under 18 years old), and aged 20 years or older. The age restriction provides an improved basis for distinguishing sample members who have and have not finished high school, a key indicator of economic disadvantage. The resulting sample of 5,729 persons includes 3,042 married women and 2,687 married men.

Measures of Time Use and Economic and Demographic Characteristics

Key analyses in this paper examine the total number of hours per day each respondent spends with their spouse overall, alone, and in various primary activities. To see how couple time fits into people's lives more generally, the analysis touches also on the overall amount of time sample members spend with various other household and nonhousehold members and in different activities (with or without their spouse).

Measures of shared time are based on the following questions for each activity: "Who was in the room with you?" or "Who accompanied you?"[4] The resulting measure of couple time is thus based on physical togetherness, rather than the amount or quality of actual interaction.[5]

The ATUS ascertains types of activities through the questions, "Yesterday at 4:00 a.m, what were you doing?" followed by "What did you do next?" The ATUS interview ascertains only the main activity respondents perceive they are doing and, with one exception, ignores

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[2]Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau (2005) provides an overview of ATUS methodology. It and other documentation are available at www.bls.gov/tus.

[3]An analysis found that adjusting the weighted sample for differential nonresponse on a wide variety of characteristics not incorporated in the official ATUS weights had virtually no effect on the distribution of time by activity for the overall ATUS sample (Abraham et al., 2006).

[4]Interviewers coded individuals identified on the household roster using numbers assigned previously during the interview, thereby allowing linkages. Additional codes for a variety of nonhousehold relationship categories also were programmed into the forms used in computer-assisted telephone interviews.

[5]The definition excludes time spent interacting with one's spouse by phone or e-mail.

simultaneous activities.[6] Interviewers record answers verbatim and spot-code each activity into one of 13 broad categories. A separate coding operation assigns final activity codes after interviewing.

Analyses in this paper categorize primary activities into the 12 categories used in official Bureau of Labor Statistics reports (Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau 2005, Appendix F). Travel time is coded under the activity with which it was associated. The category "work and work-related activities" includes looking for work and time spent in any other income-generating activities (for example, informal employment, rental properties). The analysis considers work during "nonstandard hours" to be work performed before 6 a.m. or after 6 p.m., or on Saturday or Sunday.

Covariates are based on a number of economic and demographic variables provided on the ATUS files. Some of these measures are from ATUS interviews and others are from CPS interviews. The two main indicators of economic disadvantage are respondent's education (as ascertained in the ATUS interview) and family income (a CPS variable available on the file only as a categorical variable). A broader range of measures of economic status (for example, family poverty or receipt of public assistance) would have been helpful, but the ATUS files included only a limited selection of variables from each household's previous CPS interviews.[7] Other covariates measured in the ATUS include the number of own children under 18 in households, number of other children under 18, number of other adults in household, and presence of own minor children in specific age groups. Other covariates from the CPS include age, race-ethnicity, metropolitan/nonmetropolitan, and region of United States (one of nine census regions).

Except for family income, all variables include Census Bureau–imputed values for missing data. The file did not provide imputed values for the 8.5 percent of sample members for whom family income was missing.

Analyses

Descriptive statistics provide comparisons for a variety of measures of time use across three income categories (under $35,000, $35,000-$74,000, and $75,000 and above) and four

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[6]The exception is an additional series of questions asking specifically about time spent caring for each child under age 13 in the household. Analysis of these questions is beyond the scope of this paper.

[7]Though possible, the effort required to extract additional CPS items for the ATUS sample is beyond the scope of this paper. The rolling nature of the ATUS sample (and a two- to five-month variability in the interval between last CPS interview and ATUS interview) require matching to each of the 15 months preceding the final CPS cohort (October 2003) interviewed in the 2003 ATUS (see Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005, p. 25).

levels of education (no high school degree, high school degree/General Educational Development certificate, some college, and bachelor's degree or above). Multivariate analyses assess how couple time varies with income, education, demographic characteristics, and the amount of time individuals devote to market and nonmarket work activities.

Using ordinary least squares regression models, these analyses look at the correlates of three outcomes: the overall amount of couple time, the time couples spend alone together, and the time couples spend in joint leisure activities. The latter two analyses control for overall hours of couple time: Thus, estimated coefficients estimate how the propensity to spend couple time alone together and in leisure activities is related to each covariate.

For all three outcomes, analyses provide results for two models: one containing only economic and demographic characteristics, and a second adding time individuals spend in activities that potentially compete with couple time. Competing activities include paid work (overall and at nonstandard times), school, housework, and caring for children and other household members. Although competing activities are treated as covariates, it is possible that preferences for couple time influence decisions about amounts of time to devote to work and other pursuits. The present analysis makes no effort to identify causal relationships but simply looks at results of the tradeoffs that occur.

Because the ATUS collected time diaries only for one respondent per household, it is not possible to assess the relative strength of couple time correlates for wives and husbands in the same family. To assess how findings differ by gender, the models include interactions of time in each potentially competing activity with gender (defined as 1 for females and 0 for males). All analyses are weighted using weights provided on the ATUS file. Standard errors for descriptive statistics are adjusted using a global design factor derived from analysis of replicate samples.[8] The analysis considers as statistically significant differences larger than could be expected by chance at the 95 percent confidence level with a two-tailed t-test.

The estimates summarize respondents' time use during a single day. Though useful for comparing average time use over a representative sample of days, such data cannot be used to ascertain the fluidity of experiences from day to day. It may be, for example, that spouses who spend very little time together one day make up for it the next. Similarly, full-time workers may not be working one day for a variety of reasons, including illnesses and holidays. Identifying levels of unemployment and part-time employment would require a more detailed analysis of

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[8]Preliminary estimates of adjusted errors using replicate weights provided with the ATUS files (see Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau, 2005) suggest that the reported standard errors underestimate the true values by 8-15 percent for the descriptive means in Tables 1-5 and overestimate true values by 4 percent for regression coefficients in Table 6. Accordingly, and conservatively, all standard errors have been adjusted upwards by 1.15 (the upper limit of the bias).

employment characteristics than attempted in this paper. In general, results represent average time use over the course of a typical week, including weekends, although several tables measure differences between weekdays and weekends.

Time Use by Married Parents

Descriptive analyses focus on the amounts of time couples spend together at varying economic statuses. The first set of results looks at the amount of time married parents spend together overall, alone, and with children and others, as well as the time each spouse spends overall with children and others (as a couple and individually). The next section assesses the time couples spend together and apart in various activities. The analyses provide further detail on leisure activity, which accounts for the largest share of couple time and is thought to have a salutary effect on marital quality. The analyses assess also the extent to which disadvantaged married parents are more likely to work nonstandard hours.

Time with Spouse and Others

The average married American parent reports spending just over four hours with their spouse in a typical day of a seven-day week, excluding time sleeping or working together (Table 1, first row).

Economically disadvantaged married parents, whether measured by income or education, report spending about one-third of an hour more time together than nondisadvantaged couples. This greater time is concentrated in time with children, which averages 2.9 hours among low-income parents, and 2.5 hours among upper-income parents. There are no statistically significant differences in the average amounts of time couples spend alone (1.3 hours on average for all married parents) or without children but with other family members (.6 hours) or nonrelatives (.2 hours).[9] The fraction of couples spending some time alone is close to 10 percentage points lower in the most disadvantaged income and education categories than in the least disadvantaged categories, however.

To give a sense of how the time couples spend with others relates to the time each spouse spends with others altogether, the bottom two panels of Table 1 show how much time in total married mothers and fathers spend with their children, other family members, and persons not in their families (exclusive of relationships at work). Low-income wives report spending about one hour more with their children (7.3 hours) than upper-income wives (6.2 hours, first

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[9]Note that amounts of time spent with a spouse and own children, other family, and other persons are not defined as mutually exclusive in Table 1, and thus do not equal all hours with a spouse when added to hours spent with a spouse only.

Table 1

Time Spent per Day with Spouse and Various Other Household Members

Outcome	Family Income			Education				
	<$35	$35-74	$75+	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	Total
Average waking hours all respondents spent with								
Spouse, all hours	4.41	4.07	4.11	4.38	4.37	4.04	4.09	4.19
	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.20	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.06
Spouse only	1.30	1.28	1.35	1.28	1.41	1.32	1.25	1.32
	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.10	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.03
Spouse and own children living in in household	2.92	2.59	2.54	2.98	2.69	2.52	2.64	2.66
	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.17	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.05
Spouse and other family (whether or not in household	0.65	0.64	0.61	0.64	0.72	0.56	0.62	0.64
Spouse and other persons (whether or not living in household	0.21	0.18	0.21	0.11	0.20	0.22	0.21	0.20
Percentage of all respondents spending time with (%)								
Spouse, all hours	88.30	89.30	88.90	87.30	88.90	87.80	89.20	88.50
Spouse only	57.30	62.30	65.60	53.80	62.20	62.30	63.40	61.60
Spouse and own children in household	77.50	75.00	76.10	75.30	73.60	75.50	78.20	75.80
Spouse + other family (in/not in household)	22.70	22.80	21.70	20.60	23.70	21.10	22.60	22.30
Spouse + other persons (in/not in household)	7.00	6.90	7.40	3.00	6.90	7.90	8.00	7.00
Sample size	1,397	1,818	2,027	513	1,463	1,570	2,183	5,729
Average waking hours wives spent with								
Own children living in household	7.32	6.17	6.21	6.82	6.32	6.14	6.61	6.42
	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.32	0.17	0.16	0.14	0.09
Other family (whether or not in household)	1.80	1.75	1.59	1.80	1.88	1.62	1.60	1.71
	0.13	0.10	0.09	0.23	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.06
Other persons (whether or not in household)	0.55	0.57	0.63	0.28	0.60	0.55	0.67	0.58
	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.03
Sample size	757	967	1,042	247	768	894	1,133	3,042
Average waking hours husbands spent with								
Own children living in household	4.20	4.34	4.01	4.32	4.00	4.22	4.25	4.18
	0.17	0.15	0.14	0.29	0.17	0.17	0.14	0.09
Other family (whether or not in household)	1.10	1.18	1.20	1.00	1.29	1.03	1.17	1.15
	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.17	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.06
Other persons (whether or not in household)	0.40	0.49	0.45	0.28	0.51	0.46	0.47	0.45
	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.03
Sample size	640	851	985	266	695	676	1,050	2,687

SOURCE: American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

NOTE: Income statistics in Tables 1-4 exclude 502 respondents (8.5%) for whom family income is missing.

row of second panel in Table 1). The relationship between time with children and education for wives is U-shaped, with the least and most well-educated wives averaging the most time with their children. Among husbands, time with children (4.2 hours on average overall) does not vary with either income or education.

How Couples Spend Their Time Together

One indication of the quality of couple time is the amount of time couples spend together in leisure activities. The average married parent in the United States reports spending 2.0 hours with their spouse in leisure activities — nearly half (45 percent) of the time they spend together (Table 2, last column). The rest of couples' time together is spent mostly at meals (.7 hours), doing household chores (.5 hours), taking care of other household members (.4 hours; meaning mostly child care), and shopping (.3 hours).[10]

The average economically disadvantaged couple spends more time together in leisure activities than the average nondisadvantaged couple. The leisure gap is one-half hour between the lowest and highest income spouses (2.3 hours and 1.8 hours, respectively) and slightly larger, .8 hours, between the lowest and highest education groups (2.5 hours and 1.7 hours, respectively). The leisure edge accounts for virtually all of the difference in total couple time by economic status.

ATUS activity classifications are based on reports from only one respondent per household. Spouses in the same room may experience different "primary" activities, especially when a number of things are going on at the same time. For both reasons, these statistics on shared leisure time provide at best a rough indication of quality time for couples.

Differences in average couple time for other activities are comparatively small. There is nonetheless a substantial education difference in the fraction of married parents who spend some time taking care of their children together (see bottom panel of Table 2): Only 18 percent of parents without a high school diploma reported providing some child care jointly on the ATUS reference day, compared with 38 percent of those with a four-year college degree or higher. Statistics in the next section suggest that these differences in joint child care are probably due to less-educated fathers being substantially less likely than better-educated ones to report taking care of children in general.

Note that Table 1 shows that less well-educated married spouses are just as likely to spend time together with their children as better-educated ones (third row, second panel), and that the former average more time together with their children (third row, first panel). Table 1

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[10]Child care accounts for 92 percent of all time reported for taking care of household members (not shown in table).

Table 2

Mean Hours Together per Day and Percentage of Time Spent Together on Various Activities, by Primary Activity: Wives and Husbands Combined

Primary Activity	Family Income			Education				All
	<$35	$35-74	$75+	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	
Average hours together								
Personal care	**0.02**	**0.02**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.04**	**0.02**	**0.01**	**0.02**
	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
Eating and drinking	**0.63**	**0.65**	**0.73**	**0.58**	**0.62**	**0.64**	**0.78**	**0.68**
	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
Household activities	**0.46**	**0.49**	**0.53**	**0.41**	**0.52**	**0.51**	**0.50**	**0.50**
	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02
Purchasing goods and services	**0.34**	**0.29**	**0.28**	**0.37**	**0.32**	**0.28**	**0.29**	**0.30**
	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
Caring for and helping household members	**0.37**	**0.39**	**0.43**	**0.22**	**0.37**	**0.40**	**0.47**	**0.39**
Caring for and helping others (nonhousehold)	**0.04**	**0.03**	**0.03**	**0.01**	**0.04**	**0.03**	**0.04**	**0.03**
Working and work-related activities	**0.03**	**0.02**	**0.02**	**0.03**	**0.02**	**0.04**	**0.01**	**0.02**
	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
Educational activities	**0.02**	**0.01**	**0.01**	**0.00**	**0.01**	**0.02**	**0.01**	**0.01**
	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
Organizational, civic, and religious activities	**0.18**	**0.15**	**0.15**	**0.10**	**0.15**	**0.18**	**0.18**	**0.16**
	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
Leisure and sports	**2.29**	**1.98**	**1.83**	**2.51**	**2.26**	**1.89**	**1.73**	**2.01**
	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.15	0.08	0.07	0.05	0.03
Telephone calls, mail, and e-mail	**0.01**	**0.02**	**0.03**	**0.00**	**0.02**	**0.02**	**0.02**	**0.02**
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other activities, not elsewhere classified	**0.05**	**0.04**	**0.07**	**0.08**	**0.04**	**0.03**	**0.06**	**0.05**
	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Total	**4.41**	**4.07**	**4.11**	**4.38**	**4.37**	**4.04**	**4.09**	**4.19**
	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.20	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.06

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Primary Activity	Family Income			Education				All
	<$35	$35-74	$75+	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	
Percentage having activity (%)								
Personal care	1.20	1.80	0.60	0.90	1.50	1.70	1.00	1.30
Eating and drinking	68.60	68.30	71.70	63.10	70.20	66.20	72.70	69.20
Household activities	36.30	38.40	41.30	33.10	37.20	38.80	41.00	38.40
Purchasing goods and services	17.40	16.30	15.60	17.30	17.20	16.10	15.60	16.40
Caring for, helping household members	28.20	33.40	33.10	17.70	28.10	32.40	38.40	31.50
Caring for, helping others (nonhousehold)	2.40	3.20	2.40	1.40	3.30	2.20	2.70	2.60
Work, work-related	4.40	2.60	2.50	4.10	3.20	3.20	2.40	3.00
Educational activities	0.70	0.60	0.40	0.10	0.40	0.90	0.80	0.60
Organizational, civic, and religious	8.10	7.00	8.30	4.10	6.40	8.50	9.60	7.80
Leisure and sports	70.60	72.40	73.10	70.80	73.60	69.20	72.90	71.90
Phone, mail, e-mail	2.80	3.50	5.80	0.70	4.20	4.50	5.00	4.10
Other activities, not elsewhere	3.40	2.60	4.30	4.50	3.00	2.80	3.70	3.40
Sample size	1,397	1,818	2,027	513	1,463	1,570	2,183	5,729

SOURCE: American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

NOTE: Standard errors are below bolded means.

also shows no differences in the amounts of time husbands at varying levels of education spend with their children (last panel). Thus, it seems that the difference arises entirely from differences in the reported activities on which joint time with children is spent. Education thus might be related to the way people perceive time with their children, or to actual differences in the way time is spent. The ATUS data do not allow us to distinguish these two possibilities.

A finer-grained description of shared leisure time reveals that watching television together is both the most important shared leisure activity for all couples and the category where differences in leisure by education are concentrated (Table 3, second row of each panel). Married parents with no high school diploma average .8 hours more television time together than those with a bachelor's degree.[11] There is little sign of differences for other joint leisure activities. After watching television, the most important shared leisure activity for all couples is socializing, which married parents spend a half hour doing together in a typical day.[12] Although the table does not show statistics by income (to keep the presentation less cluttered), patterns of detailed leisure activities by income are very similar.

How Married Mothers and Fathers Spend Their Days Overall

To illuminate the demands competing with couple time, Table 4 shows how much time wives and husbands spend in various activities overall (with or without their spouse) by level of education. The findings show that, on average, less well-educated spouses spend less time working, caring for their children, shopping, and participating in voluntary civic or religious activities and more time on leisure, personal care, and, among wives only, housework. Comparisons by income give very similar results (not shown).

The least well-educated mothers and fathers spend about an hour less each day in paid work and work-related activities (commuting, looking for work) than the best-educated wives and husbands. (Recall that, in addition to differences in regular employment hours, these estimates are for a typical day of a seven-day week and thus are affected by days off on weekends and holidays, illnesses, and other transitory circumstances.)

Differences in time at work are accounted for by differences in the fraction of any work on the reference day, rather than in hours for those who worked.[13] Husbands at all education

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[11]Kingston and Nock (1987) also find a negative association between socioeconomic status and time couples spend watching television together, as noted earlier.

[12]Married parents with no high school degree spend slightly more time than their better-educated counterparts socializing and slightly less time in other relaxing and leisure activities. Though statistically significant, the differences are very small.

[13]Work hours for those with work activities can be estimated by dividing average work hours in the top panel of Table 4 by the proportions employed shown in the bottom panel (after multiplying percentages shown by .01).

Supporting Healthy Marriage

Table 3

Average Hours Spent per Day in Leisure Activities with Spouse and Overall

	Education								Total	
	<HS		HS		Some College		BA+			
Primary Leisure Activity	Mean	Std. Err.	Mean	Std. Err.	Mean	Std. Err.	Mean	Std. Err.	Mean	Std. Err.
Leisure hours with spouse reported by wives and husbands (combined sample)										
Socializing and communication	0.68	0.11	0.54	0.05	0.47	0.03	0.52	0.03	0.53	0.02
Watching TV	1.55	0.12	1.23	0.06	0.99	0.05	0.75	0.03	1.04	0.02
Other relaxing and leisure	0.21	0.05	0.38	0.05	0.32	0.02	0.35	0.02	0.33	0.01
Playing sports, exercise	0.05	0.03	0.08	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.09	0.01	0.08	0.01
Watching sports	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.00
All leisure activities	2.51	0.17	2.26	0.08	1.89	0.07	1.73	0.05	2.01	0.03
Sample size	513		1,463		1,570		2,183		5,729	
All leisure hours reported by wives										
Socializing and communication	0.96	0.17	1.03	0.08	0.85	0.06	0.82	0.05	0.90	0.03
Watching TV	2.50	0.20	2.03	0.09	1.70	0.07	1.26	0.05	1.73	0.03
Other relaxing and leisure	0.45	0.08	0.75	0.07	0.74	0.05	0.73	0.05	0.71	0.02
Playing sports, exercise	0.26	0.09	0.17	0.02	0.18	0.02	0.30	0.03	0.22	0.01
Watching sports	0.02	0.03	0.07	0.02	0.06	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.01
All leisure activities	4.19	0.26	4.05	0.13	3.52	0.10	3.15	0.08	3.62	0.06
Sample size	247		768		894		1,133		3,042	
All leisure hours reported by husbands										
Socializing and communication	0.99	0.16	0.81	0.07	0.71	0.07	0.71	0.06	0.77	0.03
Watching TV	2.96	0.25	2.27	0.10	2.03	0.10	1.53	0.06	2.05	0.05
Other relaxing and leisure	0.70	0.11	0.98	0.09	0.84	0.07	0.87	0.05	0.87	0.03
Playing sports, exercise	0.17	0.07	0.30	0.05	0.26	0.05	0.35	0.03	0.29	0.02
Watching sports	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.02	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.06	0.01
All leisure activities	4.84	0.29	4.43	0.15	3.91	0.14	3.52	0.09	4.04	0.07
Sample size	266		695		676		1,050		2,687	

SOURCE: American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

Table 4

Mean Hours and Percentage of Time Spent on Any Activity per Day, by Education Level: Wives and Husbands

Primary Activity	Wives					Husbands				
	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	All	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	All
Average hours in activity										
Personal care	**9.54**	**9.32**	**9.14**	**8.93**	**9.16**	**9.42**	**8.66**	**8.65**	**8.49**	**8.69**
	0.16	0.09	0.08	0.06	0.05	0.16	0.09	0.09	0.07	0.05
Eating and drinking	**1.15**	**1.04**	**1.14**	**1.30**	**1.17**	**1.03**	**1.07**	**1.14**	**1.33**	**1.17**
	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02
Household activities	**3.69**	**2.87**	**2.58**	**2.57**	**2.77**	**1.26**	**1.51**	**1.51**	**1.33**	**1.42**
	0.20	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.05	0.14	0.10	0.09	0.07	0.05
Purchasing goods and and services	**0.82**	**1.01**	**0.97**	**1.14**	**1.02**	**0.64**	**0.62**	**0.69**	**0.71**	**0.67**
	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.02
Caring for and helping household members	**1.66**	**1.84**	**1.94**	**2.48**	**2.06**	**0.64**	**0.83**	**1.14**	**1.16**	**1.00**
	0.17	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.05	0.09	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.03
Caring for, helping others (nonhousehold)	**0.12**	**0.18**	**0.22**	**0.14**	**0.17**	**0.13**	**0.18**	**0.16**	**0.15**	**0.16**
	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.01
Working and work-related activities	**2.17**	**3.02**	**3.53**	**3.20**	**3.13**	**5.72**	**6.15**	**6.13**	**6.55**	**6.23**
	0.26	0.17	0.17	0.14	0.09	0.33	0.22	0.23	0.18	0.12
Educational activities	**0.14**	**0.08**	**0.20**	**0.14**	**0.14**	**0.03**	**0.04**	**0.13**	**0.08**	**0.07**
	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01
Organizational, civic, and and religious activities	**0.27**	**0.31**	**0.44**	**0.56**	**0.43**	**0.11**	**0.31**	**0.36**	**0.44**	**0.34**
	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.02
Leisure and sports	**4.19**	**4.05**	**3.52**	**3.15**	**3.62**	**4.84**	**4.43**	**3.91**	**3.52**	**4.04**
	0.23	0.13	0.10	0.08	0.06	0.25	0.15	0.14	0.09	0.07
Telephone calls, mail, and e-mail	**0.05**	**0.11**	**0.15**	**0.20**	**0.14**	**0.01**	**0.07**	**0.05**	**0.08**	**0.06**
	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Other activities, not elsewhere classified	**0.22**	**0.17**	**0.17**	**0.19**	**0.18**	**0.18**	**0.13**	**0.12**	**0.17**	**0.15**
	0.06	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.09	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
Total	**24.02**	**24.00**	**24.00**	**24.00**	**24.00**	**24.01**	**24.00**	**23.99**	**24.01**	**24.00**

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Primary Activity	Wives					Husbands				
	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	All	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	All
Percentage having activity (%)										
Personal care	99.50	100.00	100.00	100.00	99.90	100.00	99.90	100.00	100.00	100.00
Eating and drinking	92.90	91.70	91.80	94.60	92.80	87.40	91.20	91.40	95.40	92.20
Household activities	93.80	93.30	88.20	91.30	91.30	63.80	63.50	68.30	66.90	65.90
Purchasing goods and services	44.80	53.00	55.70	62.10	55.90	39.60	39.00	45.70	44.50	42.60
Caring for, helping household members	71.10	74.40	79.50	86.70	79.60	38.40	46.30	60.00	64.70	55.00
Caring for, helping others (nonhousehold)	13.50	15.20	15.10	13.70	14.50	10.10	11.50	9.90	7.90	9.70
Work, work-related	29.10	41.70	47.30	46.30	43.50	65.40	67.70	68.30	75.10	70.10
Educational activities	2.60	2.10	5.60	4.10	3.80	1.60	0.90	3.50	2.00	2.00
Organizational, civic, and religious activities	9.30	15.00	19.50	24.60	18.90	4.60	11.40	13.80	19.40	13.90
Leisure and sports	92.90	95.60	91.90	95.10	94.10	95.40	95.60	92.40	93.70	94.10
Phone, mail, e-mail	9.80	22.50	25.80	30.00	24.60	3.20	12.00	13.10	16.50	12.70
Other activities, not elsewhere classified	13.80	14.20	13.40	17.30	15.00	8.30	10.20	11.40	12.40	11.00
Sample size	247	768	894	1,133		266	695	676	1,050	

SOURCE: American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

NOTE: Standard errors are below the bolded means.

levels work more than wives, although the gender gap in average work hours is somewhat larger for the least and most well-educated couples than for those with middling education levels.

Disadvantaged parents report spending fewer hours than nondisadvantaged parents caring for other household members (mostly children). Differences by level of education are especially large: Wives and husbands with no high school degree report spending 1.7 hours and .6 hours caring for their children, respectively, compared with 2.5 hours and 1.2 hours spent by parents with a four-year college degree.

Considering all activities, we saw earlier that disadvantaged parents report spending more time with their children than nondisadvantaged ones. Disadvantaged parents thus appear to be less likely to report child care as the primary activity when they are with their children. The difference could be strictly a matter of how time with children is perceived, or it may indicate real differences in how time with children is spent. The results raise the possibility that differences in other activities also may reflect differing perceptions of which activities are primary, as well as differences in actual activities.

Compared with the best-educated wives, disadvantaged wives spend less time shopping (about one-third of an hour less) and are much less likely to do any shopping in a typical day (45 percent, compared with 62 percent). Average time spent shopping does not vary much by education for husbands, who spend substantially less time shopping than wives.

Disadvantaged parents devote most of the time that is freed up by less work to leisure, personal care, and, for wives, household chores. The least well-educated wives and husbands spend 4.2 hours and 4.8 hours in leisure activities, respectively, compared to 3.1 hours and 3.5 hours for the most highly educated wives and husbands. Less-educated wives and husbands also spend more time in personal care activities than their highly educated counterparts (.6 hours and .9 hours, respectively). A closer look reveals that the extra time in this activity is spent sleeping (not shown in table). Finally, the least well-educated wives spend slightly over an hour more time (1.1 hours) on housework in a typical day than the best-educated wives. Husbands spend roughly half as much time as wives on housework; this time does not vary by education in a consistent fashion. Patterns by income again are very similar (not shown).

As for joint leisure hours, watching television accounts for close to half of all leisure hours reported by married mothers (1.7 hours) and fathers (2.0 hours). (See Table 3, bottom two panels, last column.) Watching television consumes about an hour more time in the lowest education groups than in the highest.

Socioeconomic differences in other leisure activities are not as dramatic. Wives and husbands with less education spend somewhat more time socializing than those with more

education, but socializing time does not vary significantly with income. Wives who are more disadvantaged by income and education spend less time than less disadvantaged wives on other relaxing and leisure activities (including various home entertainment activities and outings), but this difference does not appear for husbands.

Nonstandard Working Hours

Although lower average work hours contribute to economic disadvantage and any accompanying stresses, they also may free up more time for disadvantaged couples to spend together. This apparent edge could be offset in the aggregate by any greater likelihood of disadvantaged dual-earner couples working different shifts.

The significant factor here is the degree to which work is more or less likely to occur during nonstandard times of the day and week. By design, the ATUS sample provides roughly equal numbers of weekday and weekend observations. As a rough approximation, this study defined work hours as nonstandard if they occurred before 6 a.m. or after 6 p.m. during a weekday or anytime during a weekend day.[14] Because the survey interviewed only one spouse per family, we could not compare work schedules for both spouses in dual-earner couples. To the degree that both spouses in dual-earner couples are unlikely to work the same nonstandard shifts, a finding of greater nonstandard working hours provides a rough indication that an additional obstacle to couple time may be present.

Findings show that disadvantaged fathers are not more likely to work nonstandard weekday hours or during weekends (Table 5). On weekdays, for example, only 37 percent of fathers with no high school diploma who had worked the previous day worked at least some nonstandard hours, compared with 53 percent to 59 percent of better-educated fathers. The fraction working on weekends displays no consistent pattern by education. In contrast, the least well-educated wives are more likely to work nonstandard weekday hours than better-educated wives (48 percent, compared with 34 percent to 36 percent).

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[14]The definition does not distinguish between early-evening and late-night shifts. Presser (2000) finds that the latter, but not the former, increase marital disruption rates — particularly when it is the wife who is working night shifts. Presser's data from the 1987-1989 National Survey of Families and Households indicate that most nonstandard weekday work hours are evening, rather than night, shifts (63 percent for husbands, 73 percent for wives). Work on weekends has no effects on disruptions. Although couples with a spouse working night shifts did spend less time together, controlling for couple time did not explain away the effects of night work on marital disruption. Presser had expected evening shifts would be more disruptive, because it is during the early evening that couples are most likely to spend time together awake and during which the wife's absence may be particularly stressful for fathers left responsible for meals and child care — a role for which they "are not generally socialized as strongly" (p. 96). She speculates that physiological stress may be an important underlying source of the effects of night shifts.

Table 5

Patterns of Work per Day for Husbands and Wives: Nonstandard Weekday Hours and Weekends

Outcome	Wives				Husbands				All Wives	All Husb.
	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+	<HS	HS	Some College	BA+		
Weekdays										
Mean nonstandard hours	**1.39**	**0.84**	**0.74**	**0.54**	**0.84**	**1.16**	**1.60**	**1.12**	**0.74**	**1.21**
Standard error for nonstandard hours	0.41	0.15	0.13	0.07	0.23	0.14	0.17	0.10	0.07	0.07
Percentage working (%)	**36.50**	**52.30**	**58.30**	**56.60**	**80.70**	**81.00**	**83.00**	**88.80**	**53.70**	**84.10**
Percentage of workers with nonstandard hours (%)	**48.00**	**34.20**	**34.50**	**35.70**	**36.70**	**53.40**	**57.50**	**58.50**	**35.80**	**54.30**
Of those w/nonstandard hours										
Mean nonstandard	**2.89**	**2.46**	**2.13**	**1.51**	**2.30**	**2.17**	**2.77**	**1.91**	**2.07**	**2.24**
Standard error	0.66	0.35	0.30	0.13	0.52	0.23	0.25	0.15	0.14	0.12
Sample size	117	372	430	561	124	343	335	517	1,480	1,319
Weekends										
Percentage working (%)	**12.00**	**17.70**	**20.60**	**20.60**	**31.10**	**36.30**	**29.90**	**40.40**	**18.80**	**35.50**
Of those working										
Mean hours	**6.55**	**5.82**	**5.46**	**3.75**	**7.39**	**7.04**	**5.89**	**4.23**	**5.02**	**5.77**
Standard error	0.97	0.51	0.53	0.37	0.63	0.46	0.46	0.35	0.26	0.23
Sample size	130	396	464	572	142	352	341	533	1,562	1,368

SOURCE: American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

Among married parents who report some nonstandard weekday or weekend hours, the average number of hours worked is substantially higher among disadvantaged workers than among nondisadvantaged workers. For example, fathers with no high school diploma who worked weekends averaged 7.4 hours per day, compared with only 4.2 hours for fathers with a bachelor's degree. Mean hours for those who worked nonstandard weekday hours do not show evidence of a consistent pattern by education, but statistics (not shown) indicate that such hours are sharply higher among low-income fathers (3.2 hours) than among middle- and high-income fathers (2.1 hours and 1.9 hours, respectively). Among mothers, there is a strong negative relationship to education for both nonstandard weekday hours and weekend hours.

These findings leave the potential effects of nonstandard hours on couple time somewhat uncertain. The effects will depend on the relative effects of the overall amount of nonstandard work, and on how wives' and husbands' work schedules align in dual-earner couples. Effects also depend on how much flexibility couples have to adjust other activities. Multivariate analyses in the next section begin to sort out the relationships between couple time, varying demographic characteristics, and hours spent at work and in other potential competing activities.

Correlates of Couple Time

As discussed earlier, clinical and self-help resources encourage couples to spend more time together overall, alone, and in leisure activities. This section examines correlates of total hours spent with spouse and, conditional on total hours, hours spent together alone and in joint leisure activities.

Specifically, figures in Table 6 summarize statistical associations between these three outcomes and a series of socioeconomic characteristics estimated using ordinary least squares regression models. Each coefficient represents the change in couple hours associated with a one-unit increase in the corresponding independent variable. Comparing the estimates with the overall mean and standard deviation for each outcome (see bottom rows of Table 6) gives a sense of each factor's importance. For each outcome, the table shows estimates for two models: one containing only economic status and demographic characteristics and one adding a series of measures of hours each parent spent, together or apart, in a variety of market and nonmarket work activities.

Economic status is measured through a series of dummy variables representing different income and education categories. To provide better discrimination at the bottom of the income distribution, analyses split the bottom category from previous analyses (under $35,000) into two groups: under $25,000 and $25,000 to $34,000. Reference categories were omitted; they include $75,000 and over for income and bachelor's degree or higher for education.

Table 6

Estimates from Regressions of Hours Spent with Spouse:
Overall, Alone, and in Leisure Activities

Covariate	All Hours with Spouse		Hours Alone with Spouse		Leisure Hours with Spouse	
	-1.00	-2.00	-3.00	-4.00	-5.00	-6.00
Intercept	3.23 ***	6.44 ***	0.64 ***	0.53 **	0.10	1.54 ***
Total hours with spouse			0.30 ***	0.30 ***	0.47 ***	0.44 ***
Economic status						
Income: <$25K	0.46 *	0.14	0.05	0.02	0.12	0.03
$25-34K	0.01	-0.08	0.01	-0.01	0.05	0.05
$35-74K	-0.15	-0.16	-0.01	-0.02	0.07	0.05
Missing	0.20	0.22	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.02
Education: No high school diploma	0.00	-0.17	0.10	0.07	0.59 ***	0.48 ***
HS diploma/equivalent	0.26	0.20	0.11	0.09	0.28 ***	0.26 ***
Some college	-0.02	-0.02	0.09	0.07	0.12 **	0.13 **
Demographic characteristics						
Number of own children in household	-0.16	-0.08	0.00	-0.01	-0.16 ***	-0.09 **
Number of other children in household	-0.10	-0.03	-0.05	-0.08	0.37 *	0.36 *
Number of other adults in household	0.12	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.13
Any children aged						
<1	0.48 **	0.48 **	-0.43 ***	-0.37 ***	-0.19 *	0.01
1-2 yrs.	0.32 *	0.24	-0.44 ***	-0.37 ***	-0.09	0.00
3-5 yrs.	0.12	0.18	-0.29 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.10	-0.01
6-10 yrs.	0.10	0.01	-0.11	-0.10	0.17 **	0.17 **
11-13 yrs.	0.19	0.10	-0.15 **	-0.16 **	0.09	0.10
14-17 yrs.	0.25	0.09	0.10	0.09	0.23 ***	0.09
Age of respondent						
20-29 yrs.	0.04	0.10	-0.46 ***	-0.44 ***	0.11	-0.01
30-39 yrs.	0.07	0.31	-0.33 ***	-0.30 **	0.01	0.00
40-49 yrs.	-0.11	0.07	-0.38 ***	-0.36 ***	-0.09	-0.07
Race/ethnicity						
Black	-0.48 *	-0.62 ***	0.05	0.08	0.12	0.00
Latino	-0.32 *	-0.28 *	-0.19 **	-0.18 **	0.02	0.00
Other	0.17	0.17	-0.28 ***	-0.27 **	-0.04	-0.09

(continued)

Table 6 (continued)

Covariate	All Hours with Spouse		Hours Alone with Spouse		Leisure Hours with Spouse	
	-1.00	-2.00	-3.00	-4.00	-5.00	-6.00
Lives in metro. area	-0.05	-0.14	0.21 ***	0.22 ***	0.01	-0.01
Region: New England	-0.17	-0.03	0.03	0.04	0.00	0.06
East North Central	0.23	0.26	0.13	0.13	0.05	0.06
West North Central	-0.05	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.08
South Atlantic	0.01	0.16	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.07
East South Central	-0.22	-0.12	0.06	0.07	0.14	0.11
West South Central	0.03	0.19	0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.00
Mountain	0.40 *	0.33	-0.02	-0.05	-0.03	-0.04
Pacific	0.40 *	0.36 **	-0.08	-0.10	0.02	0.05
Weekend report	3.54 ***	2.13 ***	-0.55 ***	-0.74 ***	-0.08	-0.33 **
Female	-0.31 ***	-0.76 ***	-0.03	0.21	-0.23 ***	-0.55 **
Hours spent in activity						
Work, all hours		-0.39 ***		0.00		-0.11 ***
Work, nonstandard hours		-0.05		-0.01		0.00
School		-0.37 ***		0.07		-0.08 **
Housework		-0.18 ***		0.10 **		-0.23 ***
Caring for children		-0.07		-0.04		-0.27 ***
Caring for others in household		0.03		0.08		-0.34 ***
Work, all * female		0.07 **		-0.02		0.04 ***
Work, nonstandard * female		-0.05		0.03 **		-0.02
School * female		0.01		-0.02		-0.04
Housework * female		-0.06		-0.08 **		0.09 ***
Caring for children * female		-0.22 ***		-0.02		0.11 ***
Caring for others * female		-0.30 **		-0.08		0.17 ***
Work, nonstandard * weekend		-0.11 ***		0.07 ***		0.02
Model R^2	0.19	0.35	0.30	0.31	0.58	0.63
Mean for outcome (hours/day)	4.19		1.32		2.01	
Standard deviation	3.78		2.27		2.27	

SOURCE: American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

NOTES: Omitted (reference categories) are: for income, $75K+; for education, bachelor's degree or above; for age of respondent, 50+; for race/ethnicity, non-Latino white; for region, Middle Atlantic.

*** Statistically significant at the 99 percent level; ** 95 percent level; * 90 percent level.

The main analyses, summarized in Table 6, apply to the overall sample of married parents. Analyses not shown examine findings from regressions run separately for different income and race-ethnicity groups.[15]

All Hours with Spouse

The first set of results shows correlates of the total number of hours married parents report spending with their spouse. Comparing differences in hours between covariate categories with the grand mean (4.2 hours) and standard deviation (3.8 hours) for couple time helps to give a sense of the estimates' substantive importance.

Economic Status

Income, but not education, is associated with couple time after controlling for personal and family characteristics (Table 6, column 1). Sample members with incomes below $25,000 averaged nearly a half hour (.46 hours) more with their spouse than sample members with incomes of $75,000 or more (the omitted category). The effect is modest, representing just one-eighth of a standard deviation in couple time. There were no significant differences at higher income levels.

Income differences vanish in models that control for time in various market and non-market work activities (Table 6, column 2), suggesting that low-income couples are able to spend more time together because they work less than more affluent couples. Although it is possible that couples choose fewer hours of work in order to spend more time together, low education and an array of personal and situational barriers have strong and well-established correlations with work hours and probably provide a better explanation.

Life Cycle and Other Demographic Characteristics

Several demographic characteristics are related to couple time. The age of children is associated with couple time more strongly than the number of children. Controlling for economic and other demographic characteristics (Table 6, column 1), couples with very young children report spending somewhat more time together (.48 hours for parents with children under age 1, and .32 hours for parents with children aged 1 to 2 years old) than those with older children. Each additional child is associated with .15 fewer hours of spouse time together, a coefficient of borderline significance (p =.12). Black and Latino parents report spending, respectively, on average, .48 fewer hours and .32 fewer hours together than white parents. Couples living in the Mountain and Pacific states average .40 hours more together each day, compared with those in

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[15]Tables available on request.

Mid-Atlantic states (the omitted category). Married parents reported spending substantially more time together per day (3.54 hours) on weekends than during the week.

Most differences on demographic characteristics persist after controlling for competing time demands. Not surprisingly, the weekend-weekday difference shrinks by about two-fifths, indicating that weekday work schedules are an important factor limiting couple time.

Although actual couple time should be the same for both spouses, wives in the ATUS sample report .31 fewer couple hours than husbands. Since wives and husbands were drawn from different households, it is possible that the difference is due to sampling differences in the two groups. Since controlling for the demographic characteristics shown in Table 6 has virtually no effect on the unadjusted difference (not shown), however, mismatched wife and husband samples seem unlikely to be the main source of gender difference in couple time reports. It thus seems more likely that wives and husbands perceive their time use somewhat differently.

Analyses not shown indicate that most of the gap is concentrated in differences in re- ported time in leisure activities; especially watching television. Husbands in the sample report spending more television time with their wives than wives report spending with their husbands. Interestingly, wives also report spending somewhat more time doing housework with their husbands than husbands report doing with their wives. These findings suggest possible differ- ences in perceptions not only of when one's spouse is present, but also of the primary nature of joint activities.

Competing Demands

The analysis considers next the relationship between couple time and time spent in var- ious market and nonmarket work activities (see Table 6, column 2). In a typical day, these activities represent the "givens," or constraints, within which couples must operate. The constraints clearly are not unmovable ones: Couples can create more leisure time together by postponing housework, arranging alternative care for children, and taking paid or unpaid leave from work. They also are relatively free to do nonmarket activities together; market work, in contrast, typically precludes time with spouse.[16] Different couples may be more likely to do some activities together than other activities, and husbands and wives may be more or less likely to do some activities alone than other activities.

In the long run, decisions about the amount of time couples allocate to work and other demands may be influenced by the quality of their relationships and how much time they want to spend together in leisure and other discretionary activities. The reduced-form model looks

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[16]As noted earlier, the ATUS does not ascertain who respondents were with while engaged in work activi- ties.

only at how couple time fits into an average day and thus does not allow us to measure the degree to which variation in time devoted to market and nonmarket work activities is a determinant or consequence of couple time.

Estimates in the first set of activity coefficients in Table 6 show associations between couple time and potential competing demands for husbands. Estimates for interactions in the following rows indicate how much to add to husband values to get the corresponding coefficients for wives.

Work, school, and household chores have similar negative associations with spouse time for husbands and wives, though the effect of work is slightly smaller for wives (-.33 hours) than for husbands (-.39 hours), and larger than the effect of work for housework.

Although each additional hour of work represents one less hour of potential couple time, the results (specifically, that coefficients for work hours are substantially below unity) show that hours spent working do not necessarily come at the expense of couple time. One reason is that couples may choose to spend an additional hour of time doing something other than being together. Another reason may be that when they lose potential couple hours to work, couples elect to share with each other more of their time in other activities.

Additional hours of work at nonstandard times are associated with a further drop in couple time, especially when these hours occur on the weekend or are worked by the wife.[17] Averaged over husbands and wives, an eight-hour weekend shift implies a 1.5-hour reduction in couple time.[18]

Hours spent caring for children and other household members are associated negatively with couple time for women. For men, the association also is negative but much smaller and statistically insignificant. The finding suggests that when husbands care for children they are likely to do so in the company of their wives, but that the reverse is not true.

Income and Race-Ethnicity Differences in the Correlates of Couple Time

Analyses that show re-estimated models (Table 6, first two columns) for different income and race-ethnicity groups assess whether the correlates of couple time differ for disadvan-

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[17]The first coefficient of .050 for nonstandard work hours represents the marginal effects of each additional nonstandard weekday hour for men and is on the borderline of statistical significance (p =.100).

[18]The sum of coefficients for nonstandard hours is: -.050 + -.024 + -.109 = -.183 for each additional weekend work hour, and -.050 + -.024 = -.074 for each additional nonstandard weekday work hour. A fully interacted specification adding terms for female*weekend and female*weekend*hours of nonstandard work shows that the effects on couple time of an additional nonstandard work hour is -.12 hour for wives and -.03 for husbands on weekdays, and -.23 hours for wives and -.11 hours for husbands on weekends.

taged and nondisadvantaged couples. Results point to some differences in correlates by income and more differences by race-ethnicity.

Separate regressions for the four income groups (less than $25,000, $25,000 to $34,000, $35,000 to $74,000, and $75,000 or more) reveal two important differences in couple time correlates. Most notably, nonstandard hours worked by wives have a substantial negative association with couple time among the lowest-income couples (-.38 hours, p<.05), but have no effect on other couples. Similarly, negative correlations for hours worked on weekends appear only in the bottom two income groups (-.38 and -.25 hours, respectively, both at p<.05). These findings indicate that low-income couples have greater difficulty adjusting to the loss of potential couple time from nonstandard work hours, possibly because such schedules are less likely to be freely chosen in a way that fits family schedules. A second difference is that the time wives care for their children is associated with less couple time only among the upper two income groups (-.25 and -.33 hours at p<.10 and p<.05, respectively). The reasons for this difference are unclear.

Turning to race-ethnicity, a number of characteristics have different effects among blacks. Having an infant is associated with more couple time among whites (.63 hours, p<.05) but with substantially less couple time among blacks (-1.34 hours, p<.12).[19] The "weekend effect" — that is, the difference in the amount of time couples spend together on typical weekend days, compared with weekdays — for black couples, though still positive, is significantly smaller (1.8 hours) than for white and Latino couples (3.7 hours and 3.8 hours, respectively). The gender gap in reported couple time also is larger among blacks, with black women reporting .90 hours fewer on average than black men, compared with .23 hours and .46 hours fewer among white and Latino couples.[20] Housework also has different implications for couple time among blacks. Whereas the time black women devote to housework is associated strongly with less couple time (-.64 hours), the time black men devote to housework has no association with couple time. Among whites and Latinos, both wives' and husbands' housework hours are associated negatively with couple time.

With one exception, couple time correlates for Latinos resemble those for either whites or blacks. Although living in the West or Southwest is associated with more couple time in all race-ethnicity groups, this effect is largest among Latinos. Latinos in western, southwestern, and mountain states spend over one hour more together in an average day than their counterparts in

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[19]The difference between coefficients for blacks and whites is statistically significant (p<.05). The effect for Latinos is positive (.25 hours) but not statistically significant. This finding suggests that particular attention to couples' relationships during transitions to parenthood may be warranted in marriage programs for blacks.

[20]Although all three point estimates are statistically significant (p<.10), the differences between groups are not statistically significant.

Mid-Atlantic states. Further research might explore whether these findings reflect differences in national origins or length of tenure in the United States among Latinos around the country.

Time with Spouse Alone

Table 6 also provides results for the amount of time couples spend alone together (columns 3 and 4). The average married couple spends 1.3 hours alone of their 4.2 hours together each day. The estimated coefficients show how each characteristic is associated with the propensity to spend couple time alone together, controlling for the total amount of time spent together. Only about a quarter of the total variance in couple alone time is explained by total couple time (not shown in table).

The propensity to spend couple time alone does not vary by income or education, but is related to a number of demographic characteristics. The presence of young children is associated negatively with couple alone time. As children reach their teen years, they have little effect on couple alone time, likely because teens are increasingly independent. The overall number of children in a household has no additional effect. Older parents (over age 50) spend significantly more time together alone (.3 hours to .5 hours) than younger parents. It is unclear why older parents would spend more time together than younger ones after accounting for the number and ages of children. Perhaps in these specifications parents' age is absorbing some residual variance in children's ages that is not captured in the child-age dummy variables.

Race-ethnicity differences are less pronounced for couple alone time than for couple time overall. There is no difference between black and non-Latino white couples, but Latino married parents spend slightly less time alone than non-Latino whites (.19 hours). Couples in urban areas average slightly more time alone than those in nonmetro areas (.2 hours), perhaps because it is easier for their children to engage in activities without their parents.

Whereas couples spend more time together on weekends, they spend a smaller fraction of that time alone than on weekdays (.55 hours). The probable explanation is that children are more likely to be at home on weekends.

Time spent on work activities has relatively little association with couple alone time. Additional hours of housework are associated with more hours of couple alone time for husbands, but not for wives. For reasons that are unclear, wives' nonstandard work hours and weekend work hours for both spouses are associated positively with couple alone time.

Time in Joint Leisure Activities

Marriage and relationship education curricula also typically encourage couples to make time to relax and have fun together. On average, married couples spend 2.0 hours in joint leisure

activities per day. Earlier descriptive analyses showed that disadvantaged married couples report more joint leisure time than nondisadvantaged married couples, and that most of the additional leisure time is spent watching television together. Close to half of the variation in couple leisure hours is explained by variation in total couple time (not shown in table), suggesting that leisure is subject to relatively fewer, or less powerful, influences than couple alone time.

A substantial leisure time edge persists for couples with lower levels of education, controlling for total couple time and demographic characteristics (Table 6, column 5). Compared with college graduates, married parents with no high school degree average .59 hours more, and those with a high school degree .28 hours more, hours of leisure. These effects are not attributeable to differences in time devoted to nonleisure activities (Table 6, column 6).

Couples with more children have less leisure time together: Each additional child is associated with .16 fewer leisure hours. Couple leisure time is associated negatively with the presence of young children (under age 6) and positively with the presence of older children.

Women report spending less of their couple time in leisure than men. That this association persists after controlling for other personal characteristics again suggests differences in wives' and husbands' perceptions of the time they spend together.

Hours devoted to work and school have only a small effect on the allocation of couple time to leisure, as work and school affect mainly the total hours couples have to spend together. In contrast, there is a strong negative association between joint leisure and hours devoted to housework and child care, especially for husbands. It is not surprising that when each spouse reports more total hours in housework and caring for children, they also report spending fewer hours in leisure activities. It is interesting that when husbands report more housework and child care, the toll on their reported couple leisure time is greater than when wives do. This likely is because much of the variation in wives' hours of domestic work involves time not spent with their husbands.

Discussion

Belying concerns that disadvantaged couples have less time to be together than nondisadvantaged couples, results of this analysis show that the former actually spend slightly more time together than the latter, overall and in leisure activities. Differences by income, for couple time overall, and education, for joint leisure, persist after controlling for a series of demographic characteristics. The gap between lowest and highest income groups for all couple hours (.5 hours) represents a modest fraction of the overall mean for this outcome (4.2 hours). A similar gap in joint leisure between bottom and top education groups (.6 hours) represents a fairly large fraction of the overall mean for joint leisure (2.0 hours).

This finding provides some counterpoint to evidence that low-income persons generally lead more hectic lives because they face greater demands for daily survival, stressful working conditions in low-wage jobs, and requirements to work nonstandard hours (Edin and Lein, 1997; Ehrenreich, 2001; Presser, 1995).[21] It is important to stress that the present study focuses mainly on the quantity, and not the quality, of time couples spend together, and thus does not speak to possible consequences of surrounding daily stresses. Quantity nonetheless appears to matter. Hill (1988) found that shared leisure hours strongly predicted marital stability even after controlling for initial levels of marital satisfaction. Whether couple time has positive effects for couples with varying economic statuses, and the degree to which these effects depend on the nature and quality of time spent together, are questions for future research.

The low-income edge in couple time disappears after controlling for work hours. That work hours, rather than nonstandard work hours or nonmarket work activities, underlie the income differences is suggested by the fact that no other activity is both negatively associated with couple time and positively associated with economic disadvantage. The findings do not establish that less work causes couples to spend more time together. Couples may work less in order to spend more time together — or to have more leisure time overall, leading to more couple time — rather than spend more time together as a consequence of unemployment or underemployment.

In contrast, greater joint leisure time among low-education couples persists after controlling for time devoted to nonleisure (market and nonmarket work) activities. Why this is so is an interesting question for future research. One possibility is that higher education leads to preferences for more individualized leisure activities. The finding also may be connected to differential access to different forms of leisure. Notably, married parents with less education spend more time watching television, a form of leisure whose accessibility may make it inherently more couple-friendly than leisure activities requiring more resources and coordination.

The analyses reveal a number of important demographic correlates of couple time. Couples with preschool children spend more time together, but less time alone, than couples without young children. The number of children is associated with less shared leisure — presumably because additional time is needed for cleaning, cooking, and taking care of each additional child. Latino and, especially, black couples spend less time together than white couples. None of these differences diminishes when we control for hours spent in completing market and nonmarket work activities.

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[21]The impression of poverty as hectic appears to be rooted to some degree in ethnographic research on low-income women — particularly single mothers — and it seems possible that lives would be less hectic if there were two parents to deal with daily needs and emergencies. Ethnographic research on the daily lives of low-income married couples would be helpful in forming a more complete picture of the lives of poor families.

Hours of market work, housework, and child care all have important direct associations with couple time. When either spouse spends more time at work, in school, or doing housework, they spend less time together as a couple, and allocate less of the time they do spend together to leisure.

When work occurs at nonstandard times, it may take an additional toll on overall couple time. Though ATUS data do not support analysis of the amount and effects of mismatched schedules in dual-earner couples, average couple time is lower when there is more nonstandard work by wives or these hours occur during weekends. Further analysis shows that this effect is present only among low-income couples. To the degree that disadvantaged couples have less control over their work schedules than advantaged counterparts, these nonstandard hours also may be less compatible with family schedules.

That couple time is associated negatively with wives', but not husbands', child care hours likely occurs because wives often are the sole child care provider at a given time, whereas husbands typically care for their children mostly in the company of their wives. Similarly, when husbands do more housework, they spend more time with their spouse alone. Husbands who do more housework may tend to be those who attach greater value to time alone with their wives. A different explanation also is possible: that spousal attention is necessary to sustain husbands' contributions to housework and child care.

Finally, although time both sexes devote to housework is associated with less joint leisure, the association is substantially weaker for wives. This result may be a sign that women are more likely to prioritize joint leisure despite devoting substantially more time to housework.

The correlates of couple time differ more across race-ethnicity than across income groups. One potentially important finding is that black couples with infants spend substantially less time together (1.3 hours) than those who do not have infants, whereas having infants is positively associated with couple time among whites and Latinos. This finding suggests that transitions to parenthood may take a particular toll on black couples. Combined with the finding that black couples spend less time together overall, this study adds to other evidence of the relative fragility of black marriages.

Latino couples also spend less time together than white couples and are somewhat more likely to share the time they do spend together with their children. The latter finding provides some support for the hypothesis that Latino marriages are more family-centric, and less couple-centric, than non-Latino marriages, although the difference is not large. Residence in the western United States is associated with substantially higher couple time for Latinos, compared with smaller and inconsistent effects for whites and blacks. Recent immigrants from Central and South America are likely to be concentrated in the western states. Perhaps such couples spend more time together because they hold more traditional family values.

Implications for Marriage and Relationship Programs

Whether economically disadvantaged couples have, or are willing to make, time for marriage and relationship education has been a major concern in emerging marriage programs. Although low-income married couples are not especially disadvantaged in the amount of time they spend alone or in leisure activities, the amount of time they spend together that potentially could be devoted to marriage and relationship education is not great (as is also the case with other couples). A two-hour class represents about a third of the time the average poor couple spends together alone in a typical week, assuming an additional hour for travel to and from the session. Couples with infants and toddlers would be committing an even higher fraction of their time together alone if they attended marriage education. Since leisure and children are the main time uses competing with marriage education, making marriage and relationship education fun and providing quality child care and family-oriented activities could help to foster participation. Many programs use these approaches.

Although disadvantaged spouses work somewhat fewer hours than nondisadvantaged spouses, the hours they do work are more likely to occur during nights and weekends. Scheduling flexibility, a well-recognized need in educational programs for disadvantaged individuals generally, may be even more important in marriage and relationship education programs striving for participation from both partners in a couple.

Many curricula already incorporate material encouraging couples to spend more time together in ways that will strengthen their relationships. Findings in this paper also suggest several more specific themes potentially worth addressing. For example, married couples throughout the economic spectrum spend very little time as couples with people outside their immediate or extended families. Since supportive social networks can help to strengthen marriages, these findings generally bolster the idea of helping couples to develop stronger connections beyond their families. Many programs encourage participating couples to form bonds that may last beyond the formal program activities. Couples at all economic levels spend comparatively more time with extended family members than with other persons. Here, the opportunity for marriage and relationship education may be to help couples draw on these family relationships to support the couple relationship.

Gender differences in couple time and its correlates affirm the value of having curricula address the question, "Who does what?" especially when it comes to housework and child care. Pertinent here are findings that (1) husbands report spending more time with their wives than wives report spending with their husbands, and (2) husbands are more likely than wives to report that the time they do spend together is spent in a joint leisure activity. That this reporting difference is affected little by controlling for economic and demographic characteristics suggests that men and women tend to perceive the time they spend together somewhat differently. These perceptions may be grounded in different realities: For example, while husbands may

engage primarily in one leisure activity (such as watching television), wives may at the same time also be doing household chores. Husbands also report more leisure time overall (separate and joint) than wives, and this gap is more pronounced in low-income families. Other research shows that unequal contributions to domestic work are a major source of disagreements and relationship dissatisfaction. Thus, it seems important that marriage education curricula help couples talk through, and perhaps revise, their contributions at home.

The fact that watching television accounts for such a high fraction of individual and joint leisure time attests to its power as a potential venue for marketing marriage education, particularly for disadvantaged couples. Television also may be a good mechanism for providing marriage education, if curricula can be designed that are engaging enough to (1) compete with standard offerings on broadcast and cable networks, and (2) stimulate more active dialogue and skills practice at home.

Given that so much of couples' time together is spent watching television, there is also room for creative approaches to maximizing the benefits of this time for relationships. Although television time may involve some conversation, it is a relatively passive activity and thus may not contribute to relationship quality to the same extent as more engaging and interactive activities. One direction might be for programs to explore with couples how they might use the time they spend watching television to strengthen their relationship, perhaps by selecting different programs and discussing shows as a couple or family after they end. Discussions of the way shows portray couples and people in other relationships might provide a way for couples to explore themes introduced in marriage education classes.

Alternatively, marriage and relationship education programs also might encourage couples to spend more time in more interactive activities. Many programs provide opportunities for participating couples to socialize informally or to participate in recreational activities as a group.

Finally, there also may be ways curricula can respond usefully to race-ethnicity differences in couple time. Notwithstanding the intensity of the time immediately before and after a birth in the family, black couples with infants appear to spend much less time together than those without infants. Among white and Latino couples, infants are associated with increased couple time. Findings also show that black couples average less time together overall. The reasons for these differences are unclear. Further research on such transitions might help identify additional possibilities for strengthening marriage and relationship education programs.

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