

“In sickness and in health... ‘til work do us part”
Careers, parental obligations, and spousal time

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of 'time' emerges in numerous studies concerning the intersection of work and family life. In general, scholars have noted a growth in hours spent on paid employment, and a decline in leisure time that parallels the trend over the latter half of the 20th century (Schor 1992)—although such trends may more aptly describe the experiences of certain segments of the population (i.e. professionals, dual-earner families, and single headed-households) (Jacobs and Gerson 1998). More specifically, family scholars have become concerned about the effects of work on the quantity and quality of family time.

Past research suggests that although work has increasingly impinged on the amount of free time adults have in dual-earner families, the amount of time parents are spending with children has remained relatively stable over the past decades. This has led many researchers to believe that parents may be forgoing personal time in order to carve out time with children (see Marchena 2003). Whether parents are also forgoing couple time as well is not yet fully understood. Further, whether these are the kinds of tradeoffs that parents *consciously* make, remains to be seen.

This paper examines how couples describe the characteristics of their shared spousal time; that is, the amount of time they spend together engaged in leisure activities, the types of activities these are and what that time means to them. It also seeks to understand to how couples facilitate time together, or if the case, what hinders their ability to spend more time together. Because so many researchers suggest that spending time together is an essential part of building strong and long lasting relationships, it is

important to understand how spouses conceptualize time together, and the extent to which work and other family obligations are impinging on shared spousal time.

BACKGROUND

Some of the earliest studies on work and family life examined the effects of husband's work strain on the quality of marital relationships, but tended to focus on particularly professions, such as law (Jackson and Maslack 1982; Barling 1984). Similarly, when women began to enter the labor market in large numbers, scholars sought to answer whether women's commitment to paid labor was detrimental to their marriages. A recent study (Rogers and Amato 2001) attributes a large proportion of cohort differences in marital discord to differences in work-family demands (as measured by women's hours of employment and presence of young children). The increasing fragility of marriages over the past few decades (as evidenced by marital discord and divorce rates) is thought to stem in part from spousal conflict over emerging gender roles in the family.

In addition to challenging couples to re-define gender roles in the family, the rise of the dual-earner family has also had an impact on the amount of time couples are able to spend together, and the stress of managing multiple roles may have an impact on marital relationships. Cross-sectional data suggests that marital interaction and quality of marriages vary by work-characteristics, as well as reports of role conflict (Hughes, Galinsky et al. 1992; Matthews, Conger et al. 1996; Crouter, Bumpus et al. 2001). For instance, Crouter and her colleagues (2001) found that men's role overload was a

particularly strong predictor of marital quality, while their hours of work had no impact on the quality of marital relationship but did decrease the number of hours spent with their spouse. Matthews and her colleagues (1996) found that for both husbands and wives, work-family conflict (which was likely associated with unmeasured hours of work and work strain) was associated with greater psychological distress, which in turn affected marital interaction and marital quality. Similarly, in examining work characteristics of both husbands and wives, (Kingston and Nock 1987) found that the longer the work hours of either spouse, the less time couples spent together engaged in a number of different activities—including leisure. Couples were even more constrained by having non-overlapping schedules. Although when comparing dual-earner and single-earner couples in the late 1980s the difference on time spent together was remarkably small (about 30 minutes a day), the authors found that *within* dual-earner families, work hours and schedules had a large impact on spousal time. In this case, time spent with spouse was also directly associated with marital quality, emphasizing the importance of spending time together for building strong and healthy marital relationships.

METHOD

The data used in this paper come from parents who participated in the Alfred P. Sloan Study on working families conducted at the Center for Parents, Children and Work at the University of Chicago and NORC. Participants in the study were drawn from 8 middle- and upper middle class communities throughout the United States and were solicited through local public high schools and elementary schools. For each family, both

resident parents and at least one child were recruited for the study. Data collection methods included surveys, semi-structured interviews and ESMs (experience sampling method used to record activities throughout the day). Approximately 500 families participated, 300 of them having an adolescent (between the ages of 12 and 18) still living in the home, 200 of them with a 5 or 6 year old attending kindergarten.

The analyses for this paper are conducted in two stages. First, survey data is used to identify a sub-sample of couples for which to examine interview data. This stage also includes preliminary testing of relationships between work hours, work stress and exhaustion, and spousal leisure time using all available cases of dual-earner families (N= 300). This represented 191 teen families, 98 tot families, and 11 tot and teen families (where both a kindergartner and a teenager participated in the Sloan Study.)

In the second stage of analyses, survey information was used to stratify cases with regards to the reported level of satisfaction of spousal leisure time. To provide the largest contrast, interviews for this analysis were drawn from the extreme categories; those of strongly disagree with those of strongly agree. Although the numbers of cases falling into these stratum were greater, the final analyses of transcribed interviews consisted of 28 cases representing low satisfaction and 15 cases representing high satisfaction. The rate of 'missing' interviews was high, since only 186 respondent transcripts were available. This required that the lower stratum of 'dissatisfaction' include the second to last category ('moderately agree') as well¹.

¹ The survey analyses sample is limited to respondents that were currently in a dual-earner family (both spouses currently working). The pool of interviews included those families in which spouses were unemployed—although these interviews were never cited in this paper. Consequently, the stratum do not constitute the same proportions across the survey pool and the transcript pool.

For the preliminary analyses of survey information I used Stata 6.0. Basic demographic information (age, number of children, and number of work hours) are pulled from parent surveys (usually the mothers') to give a general description of the sample. All analyses are conducted on cases which are not paired; that is, each spouse is considered as an individual case. Comparisons of husbands and wives at this stage of analyses are comparisons of the *average* husband to the *average* wife, not to their own spouse.

For the second stage, interviews were coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti5, and cases were only drawn into the sub-sample if a coded survey was also available. This was necessary in order to identify individuals who report high versus low levels of satisfaction with spousal leisure time.

The parents in this sub-sample of the study were highly educated (more than 50% of wives and husbands held at least a Master's Degree); their incomes ranged from middle to upper class (wives' median salary fell in the \$35,000 -\$50,000 category; husbands' in the \$75,000- \$100,000 category); and their average family size was 4.5. Approximately 16% of these families had a child under the age of 4 living in the home, and the average age of children in the family was 10.25.

MEASURES

Since the survey analyses are simply used to identify high and low spousal leisure satisfaction, only a few variables are explored. Satisfaction with spousal leisure time is measured using the responses to the item: "I am very happy with how we manage our

leisure activities and the time we spend together.” This item is one of several for which respondents were asked to tell us how much they agree with the statement about their relationship with their spouse or partner. The item was measured using a likert-scale, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree.” Among the other variables explored are: the number of hours worked, a number of variables describing the psychological state of each respondent upon arriving home from work. These include the frequency with which the respondent comes home feeling drained of energy, and the frequency with which the respondent comes home from work feeling angry or hostile. Both of these could impact the degree to which spouses are willing to interact with each other upon coming home. As controls, the analysis also includes the number of years the couple has lived together as well as the number of children in the home.

The interview transcripts were coded and reviewed, with particular attention being drawn to responses regarding quality time with spouses. These segments of the interviews were first examined for a general assessment made by the respondent of quality time with their spouse. The question as it appears on the interview guide was: “how do you spend quality time with your spouse?” (Variations by the interviewer on this question include: Responses were also coded for the types of activities described by couples, the meaning or value of spousal quality time, and of most interest, the factors they felt had the greatest impact of their spousal quality time.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

Table 1 displays the distribution of responses to the question regarding satisfaction with spousal leisure time by sex of respondent.

Table 1 about Here

Worth noting is the fact that combined, the responses of husbands and wives display overall satisfaction in spousal leisure time, with very little difference in the distribution of the way husbands and wives responded. Fifty-six percent of husbands and sixty percent of wives least moderately agree that they are happy with how they (the couple) manage their leisure activities and the time they spend together, while only twenty-six percent of husbands and thirty-two percent of wives report that they slightly or strongly disagree with this statement. Further, the two variables are significantly correlated ($r = .35$; $p < .001$), and the average difference ($\text{leisure}_H - \text{leisure}_w$) is .05, with responses being the same among 38% of the couple, and only 2.5% having responses differences that were greater than 2 categories. There was no tendency for husbands or wives to report higher than the other; Husbands reported higher satisfaction in about 30%; wives in about 32%.

Further analyses using basic work and family variables reveal very few significant predictors of spousal leisure satisfaction. Table 2 shows the coefficients from an ordered-logit model (for husbands and wives separately) which includes: number of hours worked, coming home feeling drained of all energy and coming home feeling angry or

hostile. (Number of years living together, number of children, and age of youngest child are used as controls.)

Table 2 about Here

In this case, the only significant predictors for husbands is the extent to which he comes home feeling angry ($p < .001$) and among wives the extent to which she comes home feeling drained of energy ($p < .10$).

Additional analyses were also used to assess the importance of spousal leisure time for the quality of marital relationships. Indeed, in this sample, there was a strong association between satisfaction with spousal leisure time and overall marital satisfaction. ($r_H = .47$; $p < .001$; $r_W = .37$; $p < .001$) However, since the data is cross-sectional, it is difficult to say whether this is a causal relationship, as opposed to it being the case that a certain degree of satisfaction with the marriage overall leads to more positive assessments of spousal time. Theoretically, however, we would posit that the more favorable and pleasurable spousal leisure time, the more satisfied spouses would be with their marriage.

ANALYSES OF TRANSCRIPTS

Having identified only one work-related variable that predicts satisfaction with spousal leisure time, the interviews were read with particular attention to how spouses described their spousal time, and to what, if anything, did they attribute their level of satisfaction. As mentioned earlier, the interviews of those who reported “high”

satisfaction were compared with those who reported “low” levels of satisfaction. Keep in mind that our surveys suggest fewer cases in which satisfaction was low compared to high; thus, excerpts taken from interviews where the respondent reported low satisfaction should not be considered to be representative of the sample as a whole. However, it will be interesting to note the extent to which these interviews reflect sentiments that are consistent with survey reports. Below, I present the major themes which emerged from the interviews, noting where there was anything strikingly different in the challenges and strategies these two groups expressed. All names have been changed to protect the identity of the Sloan Study respondents.

Who?

There was relative consistency in that those who scored lowest on the survey scale were the ones who were most explicit in stating they did not spend enough time with their spouses. Among the most comical responses were given by those who pretended to not even know who we were talking about when we asked about their spouses: “What about time with just _Craig?” the interviewer asks. “Who?” the wife jokingly responds. “Ha, ha, ha.” [103402]. But many also responded solemnly, with only 3 word responses “Lately, very little,” [100402] before they would move on to the next topic.

Many of these couples lamented that they did not do a good job of planning and scheduling, finding it hard to find a time to spend together when one or the other wasn't stressed:

That's probably tougher [finding time to spend alone with spouse]. Um, yeah, we have a lot of difficulty sometimes, finding quality time for ourselves, when we're non-stressed. We usually try to squeeze something in, rather than it be something that, we just sort of make happen.

This may have been a key difference between the respondents who were satisfied with their spousal time and those who were not. Spouses who described setting particular time aside for each other, or making a commitment by either setting up dates with other couples, or buying a season's worth of opera tickets, were more apt to find that they were satisfied with their spousal time. One wife describes plans for monthly dates, and yearly trips:

Like I say, you know I try to schedule a couple of times a month to go out. If we're both up at night, we talk then. If we, one of us haven't fallen asleep, which happens sometimes [...] But you know we try. We go on trips. We have two trips planned this year together alone without the kids. [214902]

Another describes the commitments made in order to have time together, expressing how important it is to her and how good her husband is at making these arrangements:

We do you know we do get babysitter's I don't know 2 or 3 times a month but we usually you know have some obligation to go out with friends or something [...] I would say once every 6 weeks the 2 of us go out by ourselves just because we have these play tickets. So it's sort of like don't ask anybody to go out to this play with us or subscribe with us because then at least we have that 1 night every 6 weeks where we're out by ourselves but you know I think that's important and he's better about having some schedule in advance

Work

As one may well guess, one of the largest commitments that take up adult time is that of paid employment. This is particularly true for fathers, who on average work longer hours and face longer commuting times back to the home (Survey information from the Sloan 500 Families Study). Indeed, when couples attributed a shortage of spousal quality time to paid employment, it was usually to the constraints that husbands' jobs posed, not those of wives.

For example, one wife explains why although she and her husband have made an effort to make it a habit to go for a walk together at night, the weather is not the only thing that gets in the way:

Steven and I, um, well when we used to live in Florida, we used to try and get a walk in every day. And here we've got to get back to that habit, but the weather's not...cooperative. And it's been hard, because he's, you know, the job, you know, the commute and the job have been time, real time soakers. I mean, it just... You get home at 9:00 at night it's not too much fun to go out walking when it's pitch black and everything. So...
[100602]

But even when the job is to blame, it is interesting to note that spouses tend to believe the solution can only come from making personal improvements in their time management. As noted in many of our studies (Sloan across the board) the fault does not lie in the stars, but in our selves.

I think that I could probably be a little more efficient in getting my situation, getting more quality time (inaudible) if I was more efficient and better at prioritizing and better at executing and better at handling my time. I bet I could squeeze a lot more time to get home you know, instead of getting home 2 nights a week, I could be home 4 nights a week or scheduling things just working a calendar, be more I guess aggressive in scheduling. A lot of times I let other people schedule or let them (inaudible) when something's going to happen. I have to be more forceful and say we're going to do this, this and this. This has to do with other

people, it has to do with my partner, it has to do with _Elena (wife). With _Elena (inaudible) . I think I could do probably do better. [208101]

But in addition to paid employment outside of the home, spouses expressed that even the daily work of running a home ate up time as well. One husband expresses this sentiment:

I discovered that we can spend way too much of our family life on sort of a logistical arrangements and the details and the bank accounts and the stuff. And not leave time or sort of emotional space to deal with important relationship issues. So we're trying to make time to do it but it's hard, really hard to get the right time to do that. [103301]

Of course, this also depends on how one defines quality time together. While one husband thinks that going over the bills with his wife eats up time for more personal things, another expresses that these 'mundane' activities are among the times that count as quality time: " With _Elena. It's time that we have now discussing family schedule issues and problems and when we're just being ourselves and having fun talking." When asked about how he feels about his spousal quality time, another husband describes the time spent together on the weekends completing home improvement projects:

Not enough of it. We try to make time.[...] This room, we've been building this room since November. It's taken three months on every weekend. I'm working twelve to eighteen hours on this every Saturday and she's been with me side by side. That's -- we're working and we're working hard, but we're together and it's a time where we can do and enjoy something together. So that's been great. So I think we get -- we get a pretty good amount of time. I'm always asking for more, but it's good. [108301]

Another wife notes that her time with her husband is time she spends while being in their home office:

Just with my husband, sometimes after the kids are in bed. Sometimes interacting more like we were both sitting at the computer doing our own

thing [210602]

It appears that when time is short, spouses may find themselves valuing whatever little time they do have together; even in cases where they share a space and time, rather than an experience (see Shore "Alone, Together").

In addition to the time that labor (both of paid employment and that of managing the household) steals from spousal quality time, there is also the reality that such activities often leave spouses feeling too tired to partake of substantial activities together. One husband expresses how after they put the kids to bed at 8:15, his wife has fallen asleep by 8:30. Another husband totes the value of his job flexibility, which allows him to come home early and bring work home with him, only to realize that it hasn't bought him too much time with his wife:

I mean, it'd be nice to be able to spend like more...a little more time with _Abby...but, she's tired...she goes to bed very early. But...you know, that's...that's life. We're just, you know...she's always gone to bed early, you know...so... [200201]

These interviews all bring to light the real challenges that work and family obligations bring to spending time with a spouse; the complexities of having to accommodate two careers, as well as the daily tasks of maintaining a home are serious obstacles to spending quality time together. But interestingly one of the most common themes was that of children.

"we pretty much have a kid centric household" [118101]

Perhaps not surprisingly, another common theme in the discussion of spousal quality time is the impact that children have had on family life. By and far, the majority believe that their marital relationship is strengthened by the presence of children in the family. But almost all admit that the absence of spousal time is in part due to the presence of children. Some express that there just is not any privacy to be had once children enter into the picture:

Quality time with my husband? We have no privacy. By the time _Emily (daughter) finally falls asleep, it's one or two o'clock in the morning and _Robert wakes up at seven (son). I'm sorry. I'm asleep in between. So, we have never any time for ourselves for any kind of intimacy. It's very hard. And, it's part of the problem of having kids so far apart. Don't you do it. Ha, ha, ha._[...] So, that would be quality time with _Brian (husband). Not necessarily physical intimacy. Just, time to just hang out. Just, to physically be together and not be doing something else. Even, if it's just reading in the same room. We went to Kapoodles the other day to do our grocery shopping. It was like, "God, this is so nice." It was just, the two of us. I don't remember where all the kids were, but just to physically be together without the kids [107202]

A husband describes how quality time with his spouse was before they had children:

No, that's one of the things that really suffered after we had kids. Um, _Alexandra and I as I said we talked incessantly, in fact one of the great things about _Alexandra was she's a good talker which I love, I really like vocal people and I thought she at the time I met her had better access to her feelings than most women I know which is really an attractive thing. So we talked a lot and we'd talk after work and we'd talk in bed and we'd talk even during the movies. She'd talk I'd watch the movie and then I'd find out she followed the movie better than I did. But lots of talking, but then as the kids came on and job pressures increased and now just scheduling issues because of kids and their independent lives, it just made it really hard for us to find time. [203301]

Clearly the children are not the only factors which the husband felt had an impact on his time with his wife; he mentions job pressures and scheduling issues. But for him, having kids was a marker for when things changed, perhaps because work and the job pressures now took on an added significance.

Indeed, some parents realized that this was a trade off. But when the topic of children was mentioned by those who claimed (on their surveys) that they were satisfied with their spousal time, some expressed it as an expected and acceptable tradeoff given their values. One husband reflects on the lack of spousal time when the children had been young:

I think that we really felt that when the kids were younger, we lost a lot of the couple time. We were parents. And, we both loved the kids so much that we were tired and probably had less of a sex life, and less time to do things together. But, I think the fact that we really enjoyed the kids and they were turning out so nicely; it gave us gratification. [105201]

Another husband expresses how spending alone time with a spouse sometimes leads to feelings of guilt:

Adult quality time?_ No...no...we don't. Um...and when we do, we feel guilty. We've got this structure here...if you leave it for yourself...you feel guilty...because you're not serving this thing over here... So, we, we...but I...I can't remember when we like had a date night. You know, occasionally, we'll do something minor where we...ask my parents to watch _Phillip or something. Um...we, we...uh...we've never like got away for a weekend together...ever... [201701]

Upon further consideration, the husband realizes that he did recently go on a trip with his wife, albeit a business trip. And this seems to lift some of the guilt that may have come from leaving their children behind. He expresses:

I mean...we went to Europe for a week...but that was on business. I mean,

that's the funny thing is...all of these things we do without the kids are usually for art business. Um...you know, we kinda enjoyed it...and we enjoyed being alone together and not feel guilty at all. But, uh...but, yes, I guess, occasionally we do, but it usually revolves around art business, um...rather than, you know, "Let's go to Cancun for a week on Sunday...without the kids." We would actually prefer to bring the kids...to the beach and look for shells or...just...you know...use it as a wonderful family vacation rather than a...uh...a vacation away from the kids. So...uh, maybe...maybe we're...uh...maybe we don't do that enough. Maybe...you know...it's striking a little bit of a balance with...occasionally taking time for ourselves just to do nothing, but...take care of us...um...might be nice...for a change

On the other hand, some respondents were highly satisfied in part because they made a conscious effort to not have their entire marriage revolve around their children.

One husband explains:

We try to...we're pretty good about that. We've always said that...you always...see these couples who have...in their office...just pictures of the kids...and, uh...the kids become their life...and you forget about your spouse, and then you rediscover your spouse like 18 years later and you get a divorce... You know, it's the...and we...we've always said [we're] not gonna do that stuff. The kids are critical...they're really important, but we got here first. So...we try to, uh...I mean, we'll probably do something once every two weeks where we'll go out [...] we'll travel when we can make it happen...joint travel. I went to...my first trip to Europe, which was in May...she went with me to Amsterdam. So, we're creative...that way. [201601]

Of course, this doesn't mean that children are entirely out of the picture or forgotten. The husband goes on to explain how their 'presence' is felt even when they aren't around:

Up until this year, we took vacations separate from the kids...but, we...yeah, last year was the last year we did that...we probably won't be able to do it...in quite a while. Because it was just, it...uh, she was thinking about the kids the whole time. [201601]

It was also often expressed that with time being so limited, parents felt that whatever 'free' time could be found should be spared for children should come first.

So, we never stay with each other. That's...actually so foreign to us...to think that we could...go out to dinner together. Uh, I don't think we'd really want to...I mean, because we have...such crazy lives that, you know...if there was time to do that...it's better to...you know...go get a movie and, you know, watch something with _Phillip and _George (their sons) than it would be...to go out. So, we don't...we don't do that [201702]

Indeed, when it came to time there seemed to be an assumed priority: work, home, children then spouses. Although respondents might vary in terms of which of the first three occupies the highest rung, there is no question that spouses, a marital pair, saw themselves as last. One wife expresses:

Well we don't have that much of it (spousal quality time). Most of the stuff we like to do, we don't really have time to do so we don't spend that much quality time together. (Since the children were born) Like I said it's really a lot of tag team stuff and I think it's just much more stressful and more friction because there's just much more at stake with everything and we're not first so it's sort of not the first priority. [208102]

One husband describes how this comes to be the case:

That's probably the area (spousal time) that gets the shortest shrift of everything. Usually on a daily basis, when we're talking on the telephone during the day. You know, when we're not distracted by the kids or other things. You know, we're both in our quiet offices and it's not distracting. So, it's there or at night just before we go to bed [...] As long as I'm not on the Internet or doing something else. And, I have to make choices. And that's sometimes a little stressful for me in terms of, the things that I need to do that I have put off. Like whether it's taxes or mailing something out like bills that need to be paid, or if I want to read the newspaper or read something on the Internet. You know, discretionary time for me is usually between eight thirty and midnight. So if I choose to spend quality time with _Sarah then, I'm not gonna have time to do those other things. [118101]

Clearly everything is connected; time with spouses is seen as time that could have been spent with children or time that is not being set aside for bills and other household management tasks. Clearly, quite a few couples do consider spousal quality time to be important, but obviously have to consider that other obligations have to come first.

Time together and Marital Quality

The Sloan survey indicates a high correlation between satisfaction with spousal leisure time and satisfaction with the marriage. As mentioned earlier, one can theorize that the causal arrow runs both ways: those who spend time together strengthen their marriage, and those with a strong marriage spend more time together perhaps because they truly enjoy each other's company.

Indeed, a number of respondents express believing that spending time together is important and even wondered whether their lack of interaction now was a foreboding of what the future held for the empty-nest stage of their relationship. One wife voices her concerns as she illustrates her most recent one-on-one interaction with her husband:

We sit there and watch TV. He'll get mad at me because I'll say, did you see this in the paper, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah? And he's like, I already read the paper. I'm like, you didn't say anything about it. And he's going, because I already read it. I thought you were gonna read it. I would like to discuss things and he [doesn't] like to discuss things. I told him, this is gonna be an adjustment. That's what she [their teenage daughter] keeps saying. What's it gonna be like next year when you don't have anybody to talk to? I'm like, he's gonna have to learn to get back to where we used to be. And, it is gonna be an adjustment. So many of our friends have their own schedules and they're so busy with their own things. And, we don't do as much with our friends as we used to. So now, we're trying to get back into socializing a little bit more, rather than with just the sports and things like that. So, it's gonna be an adjustment. It'll be interesting.

What is most fascinating is that the wife recognizes that an adjustment will have to be made when the daughter finally leaves the household, yet she holds out hope for an external source (friends) to imbue her marital relationship with what it is lacking.

Others, ironically, read a similar interaction in a different way, explaining that their marriage is a strong one, one that is able to survive, despite such instances of limited interaction.

Interviewer: You said, he zones in on the computer. What does that mean?

Respondent: He tunes me out. Every night. After twenty-three years, he's allowed.

Interviewer: You felt okay about it?

Respondent: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We have a very good relationship. We've had our ups and downs like everybody has. But, we have a very strong marriage. And, it's gonna be around as long as he's around. But, a lot of times the kids are gone in the evenings and, we just hang out. To me, that's quality time. Just, being here and being together. You don't have to be talking. You don't have to be doing something. You're just together. [103202]

DISCUSSION

There is current debate of just how overworked Americans and many researchers are concerned about whether families are truly finding themselves with enough time to spend together. Because women adopted a new family role that took them out of the home, primary concern had been whether children were fairing well in dual-earner families. Thus, what first captured our research efforts was assessing whether young children in dual-earner families fared just as well as those in families that had full-time homemakers. Having found little difference in some of the cognitive outcomes of these children, attention was then placed on whether the impact of work on family life could not instead be seen on the more qualitative aspects of daily living.

Thus, the media frenzy has created the new term “quality time” – where “real” time is set aside for family members, most often children. However, there is reason to inquire whether parents have turned their focus on children to the extent that they may have all but completely neglected to set aside time for their partners (see Marchena 2003). Indeed, that is what is suggested in previous studies which have found that despite increases in the number of hours worked, the amount of time parents have spent with their children has not significantly decreased over the past few decades (Bianchi 2000; Bianchi, Milkie et al. 2001; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001; Sullivan and Gershuny 2001).

This paper sought to discover the extent to which work had an impact on shared spousal leisure time, as well as how couples described these leisure time and what that time meant to them. It also sought to understand how couples facilitated time together, or if the case, what hindered their ability to spend more time together. As noted earlier, the

common belief is that spending time together is an essential part of building strong and long lasting relationships. Consequently, it is important to understand how spouses conceptualize time together, and the extent to which work and other family obligations are impinging on shared spousal time.

Survey responses indicated that the majority of couples were fairly satisfied with the way they spent leisure time with their spouse. Husbands and wives were not significantly different in their assessments, although the surveys did indicate that the factors which affected their responses were not the same. Husbands who on average came home from work feeling angry were less likely to be satisfied with their spousal leisure time, while wives who came home tired also indicated less satisfaction. This is consistent with past ESM research which shows that husbands are more likely than wives to socially isolate themselves upon coming home, in an effort to emotionally decompress. It is plausible that such tendencies make it less likely that they are spending time with their wives. ESM research has also indicated that the emotional states of husbands are more likely to be 'transferred' to other family members (more so than wives' emotional states), suggesting that when husbands do come home angry it may have a greater impact on the quality of spousal time together. Wives, on the other hand, show less satisfaction with spousal leisure time when they come home from work feeling drained of energy. If wives are indeed handling a double shift (as posited by Hochschild and Machung 1989), then the inability to "take a breather" upon coming home may have an impact on spousal leisure time.

Data from interview transcripts were fairly consistent with that of surveys. Those respondents who indicated low levels of satisfaction with spousal leisure time were quick

admit that they didn't spend enough time with their spouses. Those who did express satisfaction commonly named planned activities such as monthly dates to the movies or dinner without the children. Some even reported purposely committing themselves to season play or opera tickets so that they would be less likely to allow work and other obligations to keep them from changing their plans.

There is also some indication that when private spousal time is sparse, the daily interactions of home life take on new meaning as shared couple time. We might question whether such times aid in fostering strong marital bonds, but nevertheless, respondents did report that they considered 'being together' in the same room while being occupied by separate activities as "time together." Rather than have us be concerned as to whether this was detrimental to their marriage, some individuals made the argument that this actually indicated the strength of their marriage. They claimed that after years of being together, they could find comfort in the quiet moments shared without necessarily being in communication with each other.

Somewhere in the middle, between planned dates for which babysitters would be arranged, and simply shared space without shared activities, lies moments that couples define as shared time but which might be described as serendipitous due to routines. These are such moments as watching television while falling asleep in bed, if it so happens that both spouses are turning in for the night at the same time, as well as shopping for food or running other errands for the household. This brings to light the variety of activities and circumstances which respondents will name when they think of 'quality time' and that sometimes 'leisure time' does not fully capture them. The question as to whether there is some type of hierarchy to spousal time remains to be answered, for

who is to say that a shared leisure activity (watching television together), which may be passive, is any better than a shared activity that serves a utilitarian function which might also be more interactive (shopping for food together). Given this variety, perhaps what is in order is a closer examination (perhaps using the ESM) to assess the effects spouses have on each others' moods during time spent alone together. This might be considered in future research.

What was most surprising was to find that although the surveys indicated a strong association between spouses' leisure satisfaction and their moods upon coming home from work (angry for husbands; tired for wives), relatively few respondents mentioned these as factors that made it difficult or less pleasurable to spend time with spouses. Granted, work was often mentioned as something that made it difficult to set aside time for family *in general*, and when everything else needed to get done (all the family responsibilities), spending time with a spouse (much to their lament) was usually at the bottom of the list of priorities. Most often, if spouses did not specifically set aside planned time for each other, they expressed that this is because they gave first priority to the children. As one couple explained, when time is short, you sort of feel guilty if the time you do have available is spent on private spousal leisure instead of family activities with the kids. Others expressed it, not necessarily as a conscious sacrifice, but as a reality of life with a child—who has that kind of privacy in a house full of kids? Of course, many of our families are in a position to pay for sitters, so the decision to stay at home rather than hire one is also a reflection of values regarding the care of children and the personal costs parents are willing to incur (lack of spousal private time). Consequently, a

fair number of interviews suggest that spouses do indeed trade their personal spousal time for family time with children.

The fact that the surveys did not indicate a strong relationship between satisfaction with spousal leisure time and number or ages of children suggests that values do play an important role in the link between the two. While spouses openly discussed the impact that having children has on spousal leisure time, almost all accepted it as a matter of fact; it was simply one of the sacrifices made in a marriage when one starts a family. Indeed, some expressed that one traded intimacy with their spouse for the gratification of seeing how well their children were turning out, and that raising children together brings them closer than perhaps if they had not had children and spent all their time together.

Of course, this does beg the question of whether the new complexity of dual-earner families makes marriages vulnerable as they reach different stages of family life-cycles. While even families where the husband is the sole breadwinner face challenges when parents reach the "empty nest" stage, one wonders what that stage has in store for dual-earner couples. As one respondent put it: "He [husband] is gonna have to learn to get back to where we used to be. And, it is gonna be an adjustment." The question is: are husbands and wives equipped and ready for it?

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Tables

Table 1. Percent (in bold) and count of respondents reporting satisfaction with Spousal Leisure Time by gender (Among spouses currently working)

Response	Respondent		
	Husband	Wife	Total
strongly disagree	4	6	5
	10	17	27
moderately disagree	22	26	24
	63	76	139
neither	18	9	13
	52	25	77
moderately agree	44	44	44
	126	127	253
strongly agree	12	16	14
	35	46	81
Total	100	100	
	286	291	577

Tables (continued)

Table 2. Ordered Logit Coefficients predicting spousal leisure satisfaction
 (Husbands and Wives Separately)

	Satisfaction with Spousal Leisure Time	
	Husbands (N=235)	Wives (N=251)
Work Hours	.03	-.04
Comes Home Drained	-.15	-.28 ^
Comes Home Angry	-.56 ***	.06
Yrs. Living Together	.03	.00
Number of Children	.03	.10
Age of youngest Child	.05	.02

*** p<.001; ** p<.01; *p<.05; ^ p<.10