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Doing the Scut Work of Infant Care: Does Religiousness Encourage Father Involvement?

Alfred DeMaris^{*}, Annette Mahoney^{**}, and Kenneth I. Pargament^{***}

^{*}Department of Sociology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403. ademari@bgsu.edu. Phone: 419-372-7257.

^{**}Department of Psychology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403. amahone@bgsu.edu. Phone: 419-372-0282

^{***}Department of Psychology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403. kpargam@bgsu.edu. Phone: 419-372-8037

Abstract

Considerable debate exists regarding whether religiousness promotes or impedes greater father involvement in parenting. Our study addresses this issue using a Midwestern longitudinal dataset that tracks the transition to first parenthood for 169 married couples. We focus on performance of the “messier” tasks of infant care. We find little evidence that religiousness enhances father involvement in this domain. Biblically conservative couples exhibit a greater gender gap in childcare than others, with mothers more involved than fathers. The gender gap is also greater the more fathers work outside the home, the greater mothers’ knowledge of infant development, and the more unadaptable the infant. Average daily childcare is lower the greater spouses’ work hours, but higher with difficult pregnancies or fussy babies.

Keywords

child care; fathers; growth curve analysis; infancy; religiosity; spirituality

Recent scholarship has been concerned with factors that promote greater father involvement in childcare, one such element being religiousness (see, e.g., Barkowski & Xu, 2000; King, 2003; Petts, 2007; Wilcox, 2002). Several researchers argue that religiously engaged fathers are more involved with their children than others. Conservative Protestant denominations, in particular, are said to encourage men to take a leadership role in the socioemotional stewardship of the family (Bartkowski & Xu). Several studies found that conservative Protestant men were more affectionate with their children and more involved with childcare and other activities with children, compared to their less conservative or unaffiliated counterparts (Bartkowski & Xu; King; Petts; Wilcox). At the same time, other social scientists have a less sanguine view of the influence of religiousness. Their position is that conservative religious ideologies are a force for “gender reaction” in the American family (Hunter, 2007, p. 1). Because they promote a traditional, gendered division of family responsibilities, more-conservative religions are said to reinforce gender stereotypes with respect to father-mother roles. Not surprisingly, these authors found little evidence for a positive effect of religion on fathering (Anderson, 2005; Civettini & Glass, 2008; Glass & Nath, 2006), or found that the beneficiaries of any such effects were sons rather than daughters (Hunter).

Some of this controversy may revolve around the measurement of father involvement. Many studies that found a beneficial effect of religiousness in this arena focused on activities

involving older children. These include supervision, the provision of emotional support, playing games, helping with homework, taking meals together, or spending one-on-one time (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; King, 2003; Petts, 2007; Wilcox, 2002). Almost no studies have examined whether religious fathers are more likely than others to undertake the messy and unglamorous tasks—the “scut work”—of infant care, such as changing diapers, feeding, dressing, waking in the middle of the night to respond to cries, or soothing a distressed infant. These more demanding activities consume considerable time and energy, can be stressful, and may well be tasks mothers are desirous of sharing. Whether a gender-egalitarian division of childcare is achievable rests largely on the sharing of this more menial aspect of parenting. Investigating the influence of religiousness in that endeavor was the mission of the current study.

In the process we institute a number of refinements that address limitations in prior research. For example, most studies on religiousness and childcare have examined father involvement, *per se*, but have not addressed the *relative division* of tasks between mothers and fathers. We address this by employing a statistical technique that parses the influence of religiousness into its effects on both the average level of, and the gender gap in, infant care among couples. Additionally, studies of religion’s influence have typically been either cross-sectional or have involved, at most, two waves of data. None has examined the pattern of father involvement over time, particularly in the first year after birth. We address this issue using four waves of data. Most studies have also relied solely on fathers’ reports of their participation in childcare to tap the response variable. These reports are often inconsistent with mothers’ reporting of the same phenomenon. Mothers typically report a lower level of father involvement than fathers do (Coley & Morris, 2002). We employ both spouses’ reports of *each* spouse’s childcare involvement for increased accuracy in measurement. We also extend previous work with respect to the measurement of religiousness. Along with religious attendance and Biblical conservatism, as used to tap this construct in other studies, we employ rich measures of the depth of religious significance of parenting, *per se*.

Theoretical Issues

Fathers’ participation in childcare can be important for a variety of reasons. Mothers’ sense of fairness in the household division of labor is greater when parenting responsibilities are shared (Hochschild, 1989). Fathers’ influence in childrearing may also be important for healthy child development. Because of fathers’ distinctive linguistic style, *vis-à-vis* mothers, father involvement in the domains of physical care, parental warmth, cognitively stimulating activities, and caregiving has been found to reduce the odds of a negative cognitive outcome in infants (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Horowitz, & Kinukawa, 2008). Moreover, paternal supportive parenting and level of education have been found associated with children’s elevated cognitive and language skills even after controlling for mothers’ parenting contributions (Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). Sensitivity and support for autonomy displayed by fathers interacting with their children in the transition to formal schooling was associated with teachers’ positive perceptions of children’s behavior and their relationships with others, even after controlling for mothers’ similar interactions (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004).

Wilcox (2002, 2004) argues that religiousness, especially as practiced by conservative Protestants, promotes engaged and emotionally expressive fathering. He suggests that two aspects of this faith are particularly relevant. First, fathers are expected to model for their children God’s love for mankind via their role as a strict, but loving, caregiver. Second, conservative Protestantism espouses a focus on family relationships that encourages men to pay particular attention to being warm and supportive inside the family. This is likely to translate into a more open, emotionally available, form of fathering than is characteristic of

their less religious counterparts (Wilcox, 2002). In fact, several studies found a positive effect of religiousness on father involvement. Conservative Protestant men were more likely than the unaffiliated to engage in one-on-one interaction with their school-age children (Wilcox), and were more likely than Catholic fathers to supervise their children and monitor their activities (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000). Religious fathers were also more likely to play with their children (Petts, 2007) and to agree that men should share housework and childcare tasks with wives (King, 2003).

A contrary view, however, is that religiousness can impede gender equity in parenting. This influence may be exerted in a number of ways. Conservative religious teaching emphasizes men's roles as family providers and ultimate authority figures in the household. There is, moreover, a clear demarcation drawn between genders with respect both to lines of authority and the division of labor in the family. Leadership is vested in the hands of men, while routine household maintenance and childcare responsibilities are delegated to women (Civettini & Glass, 2008). Accordingly, women with fundamentalist religious beliefs have been found to experience a decrease in wage growth upon marriage, and to lower their labor market involvement following a birth (Glass & Nath, 2006). Several studies have found either no effect of conservative religious affiliation on time spent with children (Civettini & Glass), or that religious men were less engaged as fathers, particularly when their children are all girls (Anderson, 2005; Hunter, 2007; Wildeman, 2008).

Standard measures of religiousness such as denominational affiliation or religious attendance may be partially responsible for these conflicting findings. Neither factor assesses the degree to which religious beliefs are integrated into the daily business of being a parent. More germane are measures of religiousness that assess deeply held sentiments connecting parenting to religious experience. To date few studies have employed such factors. One such construct is sanctification. Sanctification is defined as "a process through which aspects of life are perceived as having divine character and significance" (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005, p. 183). Sanctification sets the stage for people to invest more of themselves in the daily pursuit and care of sanctified objects, compared to other elements in their lives. People are also likely to work harder to preserve and protect sanctified aspects of life that are under stress or threatened in some way. Sanctification is held to promote spiritual investment, which refers to the enactment of spiritual activities that reinforce the "...spiritual meaning attached to family relationships and cultivate spiritual resources to have available if and when family stressors occur." In the parenting domain, spiritual investment might consist of praying or meditating for the baby, or forging a stronger connection with a spiritual community for the sake of the unborn child (Mahoney, Pargament, & DeMaris, 2009, p. 11).

Consistent with these ideas, several studies have linked the sanctification of parenting to parental behavior. For example, mothers evincing a higher level of sanctification of parenting were found to use less verbal aggression with their preschool-aged children. Additionally, greater sanctification of parenting was associated with a decreased use of corporal punishment among parents with more liberal, that is, less literal, views of the Bible. And among those with more conservative Biblical views, that is, those who subscribe to a more literal interpretation of the Bible, greater sanctification was associated with more positive parent-child interactions (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006). Among fathers and mothers high in parental sanctification, the use of explanation and reasoning and other positive socialization techniques with children was associated with children's greater conscience development. But these techniques had no such effects for low sanctifiers (Volling, Mahoney, & Rauer, 2009). Moreover, greater sanctification of parenting has been found to be associated with greater parental investment in children (Dumas & Nissley-

Tsiopinis, 2006). The foregoing suggests that fathers who sanctify their role as parent would be more likely than others to be actively involved in the daily care of infants.

Hypotheses for the Current Study

Based on the theoretical arguments offered above, we tender three major hypotheses in this study. Although our focus is on father involvement, we examine infant care as performed by *both* spouses in married couples. The effects of various predictors on father involvement should primarily be reflected in their effects on the *gender gap in childcare* between parents. In particular, factors that elevate father participation in infant care should be related to a reduction in the gender gap, whereas factors that reduce father participation should be associated with a widening of the gender gap.

With this in mind, we first expect that couples in which spouses demonstrate greater sanctification of, and spiritual investment in, pregnancy/parenting, or “high sanctifiers,” for short, will exhibit a smaller gender gap in childcare. Second, we expect that biblical conservatism will be associated with a wider gender gap among low sanctifiers, but a narrower gender gap among high sanctifiers. This should occur because low-sanctifying biblical conservatives would be likely to follow a traditional schema in which childcare is viewed as women’s work. In contrast, biblical conservatives who sanctify parenting should adhere to current doctrines emphasizing the father’s role as servant-leader in the family (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Wilcox, 2002). Fathers in such couples would therefore be more engaged in the care of newborns than their lower-sanctifying counterparts. Third, spousal concordance/discordance on sanctification and spiritual investment may influence the gender gap, over and above each spouse’s individual standing on these constructs. Brown (2000) found, for example, that partner concordance/discordance on relationship happiness, perceptions of conflict, and expectations regarding marriage or separation predicted whether cohabiting couples continued cohabiting, separated, or married over time. Similarly, we suspect that sanctification and spiritual investment will be associated with the greatest reductions in the gender gap when couples evince similar levels of these constructs. Where levels are very divergent, spiritual tension around parenting styles could lead to greater role separation, with mothers exercising a larger gatekeeping function in childcare (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Hence, we expect the smallest gender gap among couples in which both spouses are high on these religiousness factors. A somewhat larger gender gap would be expected when both spouses are low on these variables. And the greatest gender gap should occur when one spouse is a high, and the other a low, sanctifier.

Control Variables

Any analysis of the determinants of father participation in childcare must include controls for a number of established correlates of father involvement, based on previous research. These include spouses’ time spent in paid labor, sex-role attitudes, race, education, marital quality, coparenting quality, knowledge of infants, and child gender and temperament (Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998; Cabrera, Fagan, & Farrie, 2008; Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Marisglio, 1991; Roggman, Benson, & Boyce, 1999; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001).

Method

The Data

The initial sample consisted of 178 married couples experiencing the third trimester of pregnancy of both spouse’s first biological child. They were drawn from a mid-sized, Midwestern city and surrounding suburban and rural communities. Couples were recruited via childbirth classes; announcements posted in medical offices, retail locations or

newspapers; word of mouth referrals; or direct mail. Inclusionary criteria were that spouses: (a) were married, (b) pregnant with each individual's first biological child; and (c) spoke English. Data were collected in couples' homes. Each spouse independently completed surveys that assessed the constructs used in the study. A research assistant was present throughout, both to answer any questions and to ensure that spouses completed the surveys independently. Couples were re-assessed in the same manner three more times over the course of the next year: at four, seven, and thirteen months after the first visit. These constitute Waves 2 – 4 of the study and encompass approximately the first full year of the life of the newborn. Couples were paid \$75.00, \$100.00, \$100.00, and \$125.00 for their participation in Waves 1 – 4, respectively. Data collection began in October of 2005 and ended in August of 2008.

Relatively little attrition was experienced in the study. Of 178 couples at the start, 169 completed the first three waves of the study, and 164, or 92%, completed all four waves. There were also very few missing responses to survey items on the part of study participants. The greatest number of missing values was for husband's time in child preparation, but this only amounted to 2% of all cases. Therefore we replaced the few missing predictors in the study using variable means, specific to survey wave and gender of spouse. Nevertheless, to assess the robustness of this strategy, we re-estimated our final model employing multiple imputation of missing data (Allison, 2002). Our results were unchanged from those based on the simpler imputation strategy and are, therefore, not shown (but are available on request from the senior author).

Measure of Outcome Variable

The response variable for the study was a measure of parenting involvement in the more mundane chores of infant care. The daily frequency of childcare (DFC) consisted of husband and wife reports in Waves 2 – 4 of the daily frequency of each spouse's performance of nine tasks: changing "poopy" diapers, putting the baby to sleep in the evening, changing wet diapers, getting the baby dressed in the morning, bathing the baby, getting up at night to care for the baby, feeding the baby, soothing the distressed baby, and playing with the baby. Hence there were two scales for each spouse for each of the last three survey waves—one based on self-report and one based on the spouse's report. Reliabilities for the scales across Waves 2 – 4 of the study ranged from .57 – .74. Reliability, in this case, however, may be of less import than for other scales. No attempt is being made to tap an underlying unidimensional construct. Rather, these measures were simply summary scales of task performance. Reliability would naturally be diminished to the extent that the scales reflected different dimensions of parenting ability, such as socio-emotional (soothing a distressed baby) versus tactile (bathing a baby) skills, etcetera.

Measures of Explanatory Variables

Measures of explanatory variables were of two kinds. Between-couples measures did not vary over time and were mostly taken from the first wave of the survey. The exception was husband and wife sex-role traditionalism, which was only measured in the last wave of the study. Within-couples factors, in contrast, varied over time and, for some characteristics, also over spouse's gender. They were either taken from Waves 1 – 3 (i.e., they were lagged by one wave) or from Waves 2 – 4, as indicated below. To the extent possible and provided that it made conceptual sense, these factors were lagged by one wave to avoid endogeneity problems.

Religiousness—The primary measures of religiousness were lagged, within-couples measures of sanctification of, and spiritual investment in, pregnancy/parenting for each spouse. The wording of these items varied slightly (as indicated below), depending upon

whether they were asked before, versus after, the birth. Theistic sanctification was a 10-item scale with representative item “God played a role in (our getting pregnant / our baby coming into my life).” Response choices were 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Reliabilities ranged from .97 – .98 across waves. Nontheistic sanctification was a 10-item scale with representative item “(This pregnancy / My baby) seems like a miracle to me.” Response choices were 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Reliabilities ranged from .91 – .94 across waves. Spiritual investment was a five-item scale with representative item “(I have prayed / I pray) for my (unborn child / baby).” Response choices were 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*). Reliabilities ranged from .75 – .83 across waves. Each spouse’s frequency of religious attendance was a lagged within-couples variable coded from 1 (*never*) to 8 (*several times a week*). Couples were moreover classified as biblically conservative or not based on averaging husbands’ and wives’ biblical conservatism scales. These were the summed responses to two statements from Wave 1: “The Bible is God’s word and everything will happen exactly as it says”; and “The Bible is the answer to all important human problems.” Each item was coded 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The correlation between spouses’ scale scores was .70. The reliability of the combined scale was, thus, .82. Couples were classified as biblically conservative if the combined score was greater than 3. “Biblically conservative couple” was a between-subjects factor.

Other within-couples predictors—Husband’s and wife’s current weekly hours spent in paid labor were taken from Waves 2 – 4 and were therefore contemporaneous with the response. These measures were not lagged because the current division of labor with respect to child-care tasks would most likely be affected by *current* work arrangements, not the work schedule in the previous wave. Husband’s and wife’s knowledge of infants could also not be lagged, as they were only measured in Waves 2 – 4. Each scale was tapped with a set of 19 items from the Knowledge of Infant Development Inventory (KIDI; MacPhee, 1981). A representative item is “Most babies can sit on the floor without falling over by 7 months.” Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree with the statement, it pertains to a younger or older child, or they are not sure. The proportion of correct responses out of 19 is the scale score. Reliabilities across waves ranged from .43 – .78. As with the response variable, reliability is less relevant for these measures. The KIDI is based on a simple count of the number of correctly answered items regarding infants. It most likely reflects several underlying dimensions of knowledge. Measures of baby temperament and coparenting were necessarily restricted to Waves 2 – 4. The baby’s temperament was measured by each spouse’s responses on four separate scales from Bates, Freeland, and Lounsbury (1979) tapping, respectively, fussiness, unpredictability, unadaptability, and dullness. A sample item (for fussiness) is “How much does your baby cry and fuss in general?” All responses were coded 1 (*none of the characteristic*) to 7 (*maximum level of the characteristic*). Reliabilities of the scales ranged from .62 – .84 across waves. Coparenting was tapped via measures developed by Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004). Each parent responded to three separate scales assessing solidarity, supportiveness, and undermining. A sample item (for solidarity) is “Parenting has brought my spouse and me closer together.” Responses were coded 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Reliabilities ranged from .73 – .82 across waves. Marital satisfaction was lagged and measured with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Index (Schumm et al., 1986). This is a three-item scale assessing the degree of satisfaction with (a) the marriage, (b) the spouse, and (c) the relationship with the spouse. Responses to each item ranged from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*extremely satisfied*). Reliabilities ranged from .90 – .94 across waves. Love for spouse was lagged and tapped with the love subscale from Braiker and Kelley (1979). This is a ten-item scale with representative item “to what extent do you love your spouse at this stage?” Responses to each item ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). Reliabilities ranged from .77 – .90 across waves. Marital conflict frequency was lagged and assessed with the two-item subscale from Kerig’s (1996)

Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales. It queries the frequency of (a) minor and (b) major disagreements in the marriage. Responses ranged from 1 (*once a year or less*) to 6 (*just about every day*). Reliabilities ranged from .74–.81 across waves.

Other between-couples predictors—Education level was coded from 1 (*less than 7 years*) to 7 (*graduate/professional degree*) for each spouse. Household income was measured in thousands of dollars. The pregnancy stressors index was a count of the number of stressful events, for example, “recurrent urinary tract infections,” experienced by wives during the pregnancy. Husbands’ and wives’ prenatal coping scales were based on seven items asked of each spouse about activities done to cope with the impending birth. A representative item is “asked doctors or nurses about the birth.” Responses were coded 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost always*). Reliabilities were .70 for wives and .75 for husbands. Husbands and wives were also asked how much time each spent individually, and then as a couple, doing various activities to prepare for the birth in the preceding seven days. A representative item is “attended medical appointment related to pregnancy.” Time in each activity was recorded in hours and summed to produce measures of husband’s time in child preparation, wife’s time in child preparation, and couple’s time in child preparation. Husband’s and wife’s sex-role traditionalism scales were each tapped via the 20-item scale developed by Bird, Bird, and Scruggs (1984). A representative item is “A married woman’s most important task in life should be caring for her husband and children.” Response categories ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Reliabilities were .87 for wives and .85 for husbands. We also included number of years married and spouses’ average age, both at the start of the study. Dummy variables were created to represent either member of the couple being a minority, that is, African American, Hispanic, multiracial, or other, and the baby being a boy. Finally, a dummy variable was created to identify whether or not the current pregnancy was unintended. Descriptive statistics for all study variables are shown in Table 1.

Statistical Analysis

Our primary interest in this study lies in understanding the ways in which explanatory factors affect the gender gap in the DFC. Therefore we employed the multilevel dyadic-discrepancy approach (Barnett, Raudenbush, Brennan, Pleck, & Marshall, 1995; Lyons, Zarit, Sayer, & Whitlatch, 2002), accomplished by applying the linear mixed-effects model (Fitzmaurice, Laird, & Ware, 2004) to specially constructed data (see Data setup, below). The first-level model specifies how DFC varies within couples across gender, measure (his vs. her reports), and time, as a function of within-couples factors. The level 2 model then specifies how the level 1 effects themselves depend on characteristics that vary across couples. As an example, we explicate here two of the initial models investigated. We began by estimating a level 1 model of DFC (Y) as a function of time and gender:

$$Y_{it} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}Time_t + \pi_{2i}GenderGap_{it} + \pi_{3i}GenderGap_{it} * Time_t + \varepsilon_{it},$$

where $i = 1, \dots, 169$, indexes couples, and $t = 1, \dots, 12$, indexes each of the 12 observations (2 spouses $\times$ 2 measures each $\times$ 3 time points) for the i th couple. $Time_t$ is coded 0, 3, and 9 and represents number of months since the second wave of the survey. $GenderGap_{it}$ is coded .5 for wives and $-.5$ for husbands. As with dummy coding, it represents a unit difference between genders and therefore captures the female “advantage” (or disadvantage, depending on one’s perspective) in DFC. That is, π_{2i} represents wife’s DFC minus husband’s DFC in Wave 2 for the i th couple. As male and female values of $GenderGap_{it}$ sum to zero, however, this coding also implies that mean DFC, averaged over spouses, is $\pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}Time_t$. That is, π_{0i} is initial (i.e., in Wave 2) mean spousal DFC for the i th couple, and π_{1i} is the monthly increment (or decrement) in mean spousal DFC for the i th couple over the

follow-up period. Hence, the model allows estimation of predictor effects on the *mean spousal DFC*, as well as the *gender gap in DFC*. The disturbance term, ε_{it} , is random error in measurement incurred in modeling true within-couple trajectories of spouses' responses using sample data. Model coefficients are subscripted with i because they are random "growth" parameters that vary across couples. But in the current analysis, only π_{0i} , π_{1i} , and π_{2i} are specified as random. All other level-1 coefficients are constrained to be fixed over couples.

A second model we investigated adds the between-subjects predictor Biblically Conservative Couple, or *BibCons*, at level 2, meaning that this factor is allowed to affect one or more of the level-1 coefficients. In particular, the level 2 model is:

$$\begin{aligned}\pi_{0i} &= \beta_{00} + \beta_{01} \text{BibCons}_i + \zeta_{0i}, \\ \pi_{1i} &= \beta_{10} + \zeta_{1i}, \\ \pi_{2i} &= \beta_{20} + \beta_{21} \text{BibCons}_i + \zeta_{2i}, \\ \pi_{3i} &= \beta_{30}.\end{aligned}$$

This model suggests that initial mean spousal DFC, as well as the gender gap in DFC, are both functions of whether or not a couple is biblically conservative. This can be seen more easily after the level 2 parameters are substituted in place of their level-1 counterparts in the level-1 model:

$$\begin{aligned}Y_{it} &= \beta_{00} + \beta_{01} \text{BibCons}_i \\ &\quad + \beta_{10} \text{Time}_t \\ &\quad + \beta_{20} \text{GenderGap}_{it} \\ &\quad + \beta_{21} \text{BibCons}_i * \text{GenderGap}_{it} \\ &\quad + \beta_{30} \text{GenderGap}_{it} * \text{Time}_t \\ &\quad + \zeta_{0i} + \zeta_{1i} \text{Time}_t \\ &\quad + \zeta_{2i} \text{GenderGap}_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}.\end{aligned}$$

Here it is evident that the gender gap in DFC is now conditioned on both time and whether or not a couple is biblically conservative (i.e., the "effect" of the gender gap on DFC is $\beta_{20} + \beta_{21} \text{BibCons}_i + \beta_{30} \text{Time}_t$). The last four terms in the composite model represent a complex random disturbance that allows for both heteroscedasticity and serial correlation in the model errors (Singer & Willett, 2003). Parameter estimates were obtained using restricted maximum likelihood estimation, an approach that is similar to maximum likelihood but more robust in smaller samples (Fitzmaurice, et al., 2004).

Data setup—Normally, it is customary in growth-curve analysis to specify one fewer random growth parameters than there are waves of data. This facilitates robust estimation of both the parameters and the measurement error around the true growth trajectory. Fitting a model with as many random growth parameters as measurement waves, as in the current study, can nonetheless be accommodated by including in the dataset two parallel measures of the underlying construct per spouse (Lyons & Sayer, 2005). This was achieved by considering each pair of reports regarding a given spouse's DFC as the parallel measures. Husband and wife reports regarding a given spouse's DFC were correlated .60 and .53 for wives and husbands, respectively. On the other hand, the correlation between spouses' respective frequencies of child care (using averages of both reports for a given spouse) was only $-.07$. To run the analyses, we used PROC MIXED in SAS, which requires that the data be in person-period format. Hence we converted the 169 couples into 2,008 person- (or, rather couple-) periods. Although $169 \times 12 = 2,028$, five couples were missing from the last

wave. Hence our final sample of records is $(169 \times 8) + (164 \times 4) = 2,008$. All interval-level explanatory variables were grand-mean centered, or deviated from their sample means, as recommended by Singer and Willett (2003).

Results

Table 2 presents restricted maximum likelihood coefficient estimates for a series of models of DFC based on study covariates. Model 1 shows the regression of DFC on only time, the gender gap, and their interaction, as explicated above. All fixed effects and variance parameters are significant. The intercept is initial estimated mean spousal DFC, and suggests that in Wave 2, spouses were averaging about 13 childcare tasks per day, on average, across couples. The gender gap in DFC is seen to be a function of passing time. Its “effect” is: $8.222 - .312 \text{ time}$. This suggests that, initially, wives were performing about eight more childcare tasks per day than their husbands. But this discrepancy diminishes with passing time at a rate of about three-tenths of a task per month. Based on this trend, the gender gap after nine months would be expected to be $8.222 - .312(9) = 5.414$ tasks per day. According to $R^2_{y,y}$, about half of the variability in DFC over couples, gender, measure, and time was accounted for by this model.

We next engaged in a series of analyses (not shown) to investigate the relationship between various measures of religiousness and DFC. First, using crossproduct terms, we tested for the hypothesized interactions between biblical conservatism on the one hand, and both sanctification and spiritual investment, on the other, in their effects on DFC. These were not significant. We also entered crossproducts of sanctification and spiritual investment with the gender-gap term to test our hypothesis that the gender gap would be lower at higher levels of sanctification and spiritual investment. No such interaction effects emerged. Additionally, we evaluated whether the discrepancy in level of partners’ sanctification or spiritual investment factors was predictive of DFC, as hypothesized, using DeMaris’s (2007) level-polarity-disparity scheme. For example, to check for effects of a spousal discrepancy in theistic sanctification on DFC, we employed spouses’ average sanctification (level), the absolute difference in spouses’ levels of sanctification (disparity), and a dummy variable for the wife being higher in sanctification (polarity) in the model, along with crossproducts of these factors with the gender-gap term. A similar treatment was used for nontheistic sanctification and spiritual investment in pregnancy/parenting. No such discrepancy effects were observed. In sum, all these efforts revealed only one consistent effect: The more religious the couple, the greater the gender gap “in favor” of moms. This effect was invariant to how religiousness was measured, whether via sanctification, spiritual investment, religious attendance, or biblical conservatism. Rather than show the same effect over and over but with different measures of religiousness, we employed the BIC (Fitzmaurice et al., 2004) to choose the most robust and parsimonious specification to display. This turned out to be the model using the dummy for being biblically conservative along with its interaction with the gender gap, and is shown as Model 2 in the table.

The model shows that, although being biblically conservative doesn’t elevate mean spousal DFC, it does have a significant effect on the gender gap. The gender gap is now $7.215 - .312 \text{ time} + 2.001 \text{ biblically conservative}$. Thus, initially, wives in couples who were not biblically conservative performed just over seven more childcare tasks per day than their husbands. But among biblical conservatives, this difference was larger, at just over nine tasks per day. We suspected that this effect was most likely due to biblical conservatives being more traditional than other couples in their attitudes toward sex roles. Therefore, we added sex-role traditionalism and its interaction with the gender gap in the next model (Model 3). With these factors added, the effect of being biblically conservative on the

gender gap was noticeably reduced (.628 vs. 2.001) and no longer significant. Instead, both spouses' sex-role traditionalism scores increased the gender gap in favor of wives, although the effect of her traditionalism was more significant than the effect of his. However, in that sex-role traditionalism was measured in the last wave of the survey only, it could be argued to be endogenous to DFC. That is, the father's ability or inability to effectively care for the infant could have influenced both spouses' later attitudes toward gender roles. Given this consideration, we removed sex-role traditionalism from the model before continuing our analyses.

We continued by investigating the effects of the remaining within-couples factors. The next predictor examined was work status. In order to tease out how childcare was apportioned as a function of the couples' relative time spent in paid labor, we again employed the level-polarity-disparity approach, including in the model spouses' average work hours (*average work hours*), the absolute value of the discrepancy between their work hours (*work disparity*), and a dummy variable flagging couples in which the wife works more hours than the husband (*wife works more*). We also included a term representing the interaction between work disparity and whether the wife works more hours. The results are shown as Model 4. They suggest, first, that the higher the average number of hours worked by spouses, the lower the mean spousal DFC (the coefficient is $-.034$). Although the gender gap was elevated by a greater work disparity between spouses, this effect was tempered by a second-order interaction between work disparity and the wife working more hours. Figure 1 depicts the resulting estimated gender gap in DFC as a function of the discrepancy in spouses' work hours, biblical-conservatism status, and whether the wife works more hours than the husband. As is evident, the greater the work-hours disparity in his "favor," the greater the gender gap. But the greater the work-hours disparity in her "favor," the lower the gender gap. In either scenario, biblically conservative couples exhibited a greater gender gap in DFC.

The final model after examining the effects of the rest of the within-couples and between-couples predictors is shown as Model 5 in Table 2. Most of the additional factors investigated had no effect on either average DFC or the gender gap and so are not included in this model. This includes, surprisingly, such predictors as marital and coparenting quality, the father's prenatal involvement, the baby's gender, and intendedness of the pregnancy. As is evident in the model, a handful of added factors were, however, important. The gender gap was greater the greater the wife's knowledge of infant development, controlling for the husband's knowledge. Each tenth of a unit increase in her KIDI score is expected to increase the gender gap by $(.1)(3.112) = .3$, or about three-tenths of a task per day. The baby's fussiness elevated mean spousal DFC, while the baby's unadaptability increased the gender gap. In the final model we once again included sex-role traditionalism in order to control for its association with biblical conservatism. As before, it reduced the biblical conservatism effect on the gender gap to nonsignificance. And once again, the wife's sex-role traditionalism appeared to be more important than the husband's. Finally, mean spousal DFC was greater the more stressful the pregnancy was. The final model accounted for almost 60% of the variability in the response.

Discussion

The impetus behind this study was to shed further light on the issue of whether various aspects of religiousness are a force that facilitates father involvement in childcare, or a roadblock to progress toward gender equality in parenting. Regardless of whether religiousness was assessed with global religious variables, such as religious attendance or Biblical conservatism, or specific religious beliefs and practices focused on parenting, only one trend was manifest. More-religious couples displayed a greater gender gap than others

in caring for newborns, with mothers doing substantially more of the work than fathers. Further investigation revealed this to be largely a function of the association of religiousness with more conservative sex-role attitudes. To the extent that religiousness promotes a traditional gendered division of labor with respect to childcare, then, our evidence suggests that it hinders rather than furthers the goal of gender equality in parenting. This finding is consistent with several prior studies (Anderson, 2005; Civettini & Glass, 2008; Glass & Nath 2006; Hunter, 2007; Roggman, Benson, & Boyce, 1999; Wildeman, 2008). As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, however, this is not necessarily a negative outcome for the minority of mothers who prefer to exercise control over this arena. Hakim (1996, 2003) suggests that anywhere from 10% to 30% of women, depending upon the nation surveyed, are home- or family-centered. After marriage, they prefer to give priority to home and family life over market work. For these women, a religion that reinforces a traditional domestic division of labor may be a force for empowerment, rather than exploitation.

The failure to replicate the effects of religiousness found by many others (Bartkowski & Xu; King, 2003; Petts, 2007; Wilcox, 2002) may be partly due to differences between our study and much previous research. Whereas other studies have examined fathers' performance of childcare, *per se*, we focused on the gender *gap* in childcare. One might argue that religious fathers do more childcare activities than others even though it is substantially less than that done by their wives. Yet in that case we would expect to see religiousness associated with a greater mean spousal DFC. But this finding did not emerge. On the other hand, we also limited our attention to the basic care of newborns, and it may be precisely this activity that is most influenced by traditional attitudes regarding the suitability of fathers versus mothers in caring for children. Moreover, the kinds of daily tasks tapped by DFC represent aspects of childcare that must be performed on schedule to ensure the health, if not the very life, of newborns. As such these duties are much less discretionary than the kinds of activities examined in many other studies, such as reading to children, or helping them with homework. Therefore, there is most likely much less latitude for religiousness to have an impact on DFC, compared to these other forms of engagement with children (cf. Portman & Van Der Lippe, 2009, for a similar explanation for the lack of an effect of individual preferences on childcare).

Several other characteristics were found to be influential in infant care. The frequency of infant care was found to decline over time, since older infants require less attention than newborns. And this decline was greater for mothers than fathers, resulting also in a declining gender gap in infant care with the passage of time. Additionally, as found by others (Aldous et al., 1998; Marisglio, 1991; Yeung et al., 2001), couples' work arrangements were important determinants of both the level of overall care and the gender gap in care. More hours spent by spouses in paid labor were associated with a lower frequency of infant care, net of other factors. And the more time mothers spent in paid labor, relative to fathers, the lower the gender gap in infant care. The gender gap, however, was larger the greater her knowledge of infant development, and the more traditional her attitudes toward sex roles, controlling for the same characteristics of her husband. That mothers' characteristics were more important than fathers' in this regard suggests the influence of maternal gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Fussy infants elevated the mean spousal level of infant care, while unpredictable infants increased the gender gap in infant care. Babies also appeared to require a greater average level of care when the pregnancy was more stressful.

Our work has some limitations that must be mentioned. An anonymous reviewer suggested that one such drawback was our failure to assess whether mothers were breastfeeding. He or she believed that mothers may be doing more of the infant care because of this factor. Our study is also of limited generalizability compared to work based on large probability samples of the U.S. population (e.g., Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Hunter, 2007; Wilcox, 2002;

Wildeman, 2008). Ours is a convenience sample of mostly White, middle-class, happily married, biological, first-time parents. As such, our couples display less variability in paternal involvement than might be exhibited by a more representative sample. An anonymous reviewer also observed that we cannot disentangle causality from selection with respect to the association of biblical conservatism and sex-role traditionalism with a greater gender gap in DFC. It is possible that those who prefer a more traditional division of labor with respect to childcare gravitate toward religious communities that support that decision.

Our work has several implications for couples with newborns, especially those seeking to forge a gender-egalitarian division of labor in infant care. First, happily married parents who more often invest parenting with spiritual significance, attend religious services, or interpret the Bible literally should not assume that these religious factors will motivate greater involvement by fathers in infant care. Rather couples should examine the extent to which they possess stereotypical beliefs regarding gender roles in the family, and whether such beliefs are consistent with their religious views of family life. Our findings suggest that traditional beliefs about paternal and maternal roles in family life are strongly associated with an unequal division of labor in infant care, with mothers shouldering most of the burden. Further, to the extent that religious organizations and families wish for fathers to seek a more active role in parenting infants, it behooves fathers to learn as much as possible about child development. Our results suggest that, the greater the gap in knowledge about infant development between mothers and fathers, the more that mothers will monopolize infant care. Thus, religious communities who wish to increase father involvement in parenting could potentially facilitate this goal by creating parenting workshops focused on increasing knowledge about child development that coincide with religious naming rituals for infants (e.g., infant baptisms). Finally, the relative proportion of time spouses spend engaged in paid labor appears to be a chief determinant of the gender gap in infant care. Couples need to consider the costs and benefits of trading some of that time for an enhanced presence at home with the newborn. For a father, such an investment may be particularly important for establishing a strong bond with his new son or daughter.

Whether religion and spirituality foster, as opposed to impede, greater father involvement and how they accomplish such a task has yet to be decided. Our work suggests that father participation in the critical routine care that must be given to newborns is not particularly elevated by religiousness. Instead, more-religious couples appear to subscribe to traditional notions of the unsuitability of men for infant care. Accordingly, more-religious women perform proportionately more of the required daily work of early parenting. That said, the influence of religion might be felt in other positive ways in different dimensions of the care of infants and toddlers. For example, are the more religious less likely to exhibit hostility or become abusive when faced with temper tantrums or other difficulties connected with infants? Or, do more religious couples experience less conflict over childrearing than others, thereby maintaining more marital harmony in the face of parenting stress? Future work should continue to address these issues while utilizing a wide range of religiousness measures, including those assessing the interface of religious or spiritual experiences with parenting, in particular.

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Figure 1.
The Gender Gap in Daily Frequency of Childcare (DFC) as a Function of the Absolute Difference in Spouses' Work Hours, Biblical Conservatism, and Whether the Wife Works More Hours

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Outcome^a</i>			
Daily Frequency of Childcare	0.643 – 24	11.944	5.157
<i>Between-Couples Predictors^b</i>			
Biblically Conservative Couple	0 – 1	0.503	0.501
Husband's Education	3 – 7	5.663	0.944
Wife's Education	4 – 7	5.935	0.860
Number of Years Married @ T1	0.083 – 10.167	2.660	2.042
Spouses' Average Age	20.5 – 38.5	28.000	3.796
Minority Couple	0 – 1	0.189	0.393
Pregnancy Was Unintended	0 – 1	0.450	0.499
Household Income	12.5 – 150	63.151	30.224
Baby is Male	0 – 1	0.485	0.501
Pregnancy Stressors Index	1 – 16	5.882	2.841
Husband's Prenatal Coping	12 – 34	23.711	4.194
Wife's Prenatal Coping	17 – 35	26.674	3.543
Husband's Time in Child Preparation ^c	0 – 30	1.673	3.192
Wife's Time in Child Preparation ^c	0 – 84	6.149	10.848
Couple's Time in Child Preparation ^c	0 – 84	4.893	6.637
Husband's Sex-Role Traditionalism	23 – 97	60.412	14.801
Wife's Sex-Role Traditionalism	20 – 116	56.459	15.882
<i>Within-Couples Predictors^c</i>			
Husband's Theistic Sanctification	10 – 70	52.929	16.483
Husband's Nontheistic Sanctification	10 – 70	53.287	12.251
Husband's Spiritual Investment	5 – 35	19.485	7.671
Wife's Theistic Sanctification	10 – 70	56.581	15.288
Wife's Nontheistic Sanctification	12 – 70	55.092	11.782
Wife's Spiritual Investment	5 – 35	21.551	7.156
Religious Attendance	1 – 8	5.202	2.142
Husband's Work Hours	0 – 80	43.507	13.602
Wife's Work Hours	0 – 72	23.094	17.717
Husband's KIDI Score ^a	0.105 – 0.947	0.660	0.151
Wife's KIDI Score ^a	0.211 – 1	0.738	0.133
Baby's Fussiness ^a	6 – 36	18.126	5.092
Baby's Unpredictability ^a	3 – 19	8.210	2.971
Baby's Unadaptability ^a	4 – 23	9.291	3.417
Baby's Dullness ^a	3 – 18	6.271	2.464

Variable	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Coparenting Solidarity ^a	21 – 50	40.573	4.311
Coparenting Supportiveness ^a	7 – 25	21.182	2.615
Coparenting Undermining ^a	6 – 21	7.922	2.624
Marital Satisfaction	3 – 21	18.970	2.325
Love for Spouse	27 – 90	80.978	7.248
Marital Conflict Frequency	2 – 11	5.774	2.091

^aBased on $N = 2,008$ couple-periods.

^bBased on $N = 169$ couples, except where indicated.

^cBased on $N = 2,028$ couple-periods, except where indicated.

Table 2
Restricted Maximum Likelihood Coefficient Estimates (Standard Errors) for Linear Mixed-Effects Models of Parental Involvement

Explanatory Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Level 1 Fixed Effects</i>					
Intercept	12.928*** (0.155)	12.924*** (0.199)	12.923*** (0.210)	13.838*** (0.458)	13.692*** (0.454)
Gender Gap	8.222*** (0.343)	7.215*** (0.457)	7.905*** (0.466)	5.526*** (0.872)	5.853*** (0.859)
Time (months)	-0.252*** (0.019)	-0.252*** (0.019)	-0.252*** (0.019)	-0.242*** (0.019)	-0.232*** (0.019)
Gender Gap x Time	-0.312*** (0.032)	-0.312*** (0.032)	-0.312*** (0.032)	-0.268*** (0.032)	-0.286*** (0.033)
Average Work Hours				-0.034*** (0.010)	-0.030** (0.010)
Work Disparity				0.011 (0.006)	0.010 (0.006)
Wife Works More				0.411 (0.422)	0.502 (0.416)
Gender Gap x Average Work Hours				-0.009 (0.019)	-0.000 (0.019)
Gender Gap x Work Disparity				0.096*** (0.011)	0.095*** (0.011)
Gender Gap x Wife Works More				0.490 (0.788)	0.426 (0.782)
Work Disparity x Wife Works More				-0.023 (0.016)	-0.025 (0.016)
Gender Gap x Work Disparity x Wife Works More				-0.161*** (0.031)	-0.162*** (0.030)
Wife's KIDI Score					-0.960 (0.664)
Husband's KIDI Score					-0.073 (0.595)
Gender Gap x Wife's KIDI Score					3.112* (1.278)
Gender Gap x Husband's KIDI Score					-1.766 (1.133)

Explanatory Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Baby's Fussiness					0.041* (0.019)
Baby's Unadaptability					0.042 (0.026)
Gender Gap x Baby's Unadaptability					0.167*** (0.050)
Spiritual Investment					0.025 (0.014)
<i>Level 2 Fixed Effects</i>					
Biblically Conservative Couple		0.008 (0.247)	0.011 (0.282)	-0.138 (0.252)	-0.148 (0.289)
Biblically Conservative Couple x Gender Gap		2.001** (0.619)	0.628 (0.670)	1.453** (0.536)	0.470 (0.571)
Husband's Sex-Role Traditionalism			-0.005 (0.010)		-0.006 (0.010)
Wife's Sex-Role Traditionalism			0.004 (0.010)		-0.006 (0.010)
Husband's Sex-Role Traditionalism x Gender Gap			0.048 ^d (0.025)		0.040 (0.021)
Wife's Sex-Role Traditionalism x Gender Gap			0.062** (0.023)		0.044* (0.020)
Pregnancy Stressors Index					0.102* (0.043)
<i>Variance Parameters</i>					
Intercept	2.770*** (0.444)	2.786*** (0.446)	2.807*** (0.452)	2.950*** (0.463)	2.620*** (0.433)
Gender Gap	14.747*** (1.873)	13.832*** (1.780)	12.334*** (1.626)	9.696*** (1.343)	8.371*** (1.213)
Time (months)	0.015** (0.007)	0.015** (0.007)	0.015** (0.007)	0.015** (0.006)	0.012* (0.006)
Level 1 Error	7.145*** (0.261)	7.145*** (0.261)	7.145*** (0.261)	6.817*** (0.250)	6.803*** (0.250)
$R^2_{Y,\hat{Y}}$	0.508	0.518	0.534	0.567	0.594

Note: $N = 2008$ couple-periods.

^a p is .0507.

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

 $p < .001$.