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Children's Experiences of Time when a Parent Travels for Work

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Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on different ways time is experienced by children in families who face time challenges due to a family member's job that required work travel. Data are from a family-level study that includes interviews of all family members over the age of 7. Using grounded theory methodology, this study illustrates ways in which job demands and family processes interact. Analysis centers on the 75 children's perspectives from 43 families. Holding together assessments of having enough time while wanting more time with their parents, children express emotion, generally unrecognized by parents, around the topic of family time. Children's experience of time with parents is rushed or calm, depending on the activities done in time and the gender of the parent with whom they spend time. Findings are interpreted through a feminist social constructionist lens.

Keywords

Children; Families and Work; Family Interaction; Feminism; Grounded Theory

Everyday lived experience is important for what it reveals about family life (Daly, 1996; 2001; Ochs & Kremer-Sedlik, 2013). This study focuses on how family members experience time and has, at its nucleus, children's experiences of time. Children's voices provide a refreshing and unique view of family life, especially when connected with the viewpoints of their parents (Clark, 2011). There is little qualitative work on children's experiences with family life in general, much less related to parental work, an important gap to address (Clark, 2011; Gibson, 2012). The bidirectionality of the parent/child relationship has been widely accepted in child development and family studies literature (Harach & Kuczynski, 2005; Maccoby, 1992), yet little work examines how children feel about time with parents and family time, beyond parents' perceptions and worries (Daly, 2001; Galinsky, 1999). Incorporating multiple points of view about time from within the family are challenging but necessary steps in understanding time in families.

The larger literature on work and family life documents that North Americans today perceive a time crunch or speed-up (e.g., Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). This project sampled families who were highly likely to experience time challenges (Jeong, Zvonkovic, & Acocck, 2013), families who have at least one parent who travelled frequently for work. While there

is a literature on the consequences of high work hours and high job demands in general (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Voydanoff, 2005; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006), there have been few studies of work travel and its impact on individuals and families. Recent research on workers' feelings about their jobs since the recession indicates that workers perceive that their jobs are unstable and they therefore are likely to acquiesce to high work demands, including travel, in order to present themselves as dedicated workers (Zvonkovic, Lee, Brooks-Hurst, & Lee, 2014; Pugh, 2015). This study adds to the growing need to understand how work demands impact families by assessing the experience of time within families with children; exploring not only how children experience time, but also how children's experiences of time converges or contrasts with other family members using a grounded theory methodology from qualitative interviews with children and parents, discussing how they make meaning of their time with each other. Families who experience work-related travel were chosen for this study, because the intermittent coming and going from the household has the potential to evoke nuanced thoughts regarding family time.

Time Pressures for Today's Families

Family members' backgrounds, expectations, and experiences get played out *in time*, inclusive of both long spans of time as well as daily events. Mattingly and Sayer (2006) demonstrated how gender differences in feeling pressed for time operate for married couples, as they articulated the connection between objective free time and the perception of time pressure, such that women's time pressure increased significantly over time, but men's did not. In addition, more free time reduced men's, but not women's, perceptions of feeling rushed. One study of how upper-middle-class children experience time, from the vantage point of nannies, illuminated that there can be different views of how much interaction time with parents occurs and how important spending time with their children is to be a good parent (Brown, 2011).

Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2007) made the point that, although parents increasingly feel the pressure to devote more time resources to children, parents are in fact directing more time, resources, and attention toward their children than thirty years ago. Especially among parents with higher socioeconomic status, parents have been found to provide more resources, on average, to a child during childhood and adolescence than parents in lower socioeconomic conditions (Fingerman, Kim, Davis, Furstenberg, Birditt, & Zarit, 2015). When interviewing middle-class children directly, Galinsky (1999) reported that they rarely stated that they wanted more time with their parents. Instead, they wished for more money and for their parents to be less stressed. It is possible that the stress children observed resulted from what leisure studies scholars Robinson and Godbey (1997) termed "time deepening" by parents. Robinson and Godbey probed the effects of high work hours on free time among parents and documented the phenomenon of "time deepening" (or multi-tasking) when adults are at home. Sayer (2007) further examined this phenomenon and found that dual-earner parents spend more than 30 hours a week multi-tasking. In a qualitative study on middle- and upper-middle class parents, Snyder (2007) identified the most prevalent type of definition of quality time focused on structured planning for specific activities, with the next prevalent type being child-centered, focused on the communication

that occurs when parents are accessible to their children. No matter which type of construction of quality time parents espoused, they experienced problems with getting enough quality time with their children.

Scholars and social critics have called attention to the high number of activities outside of school in which children, especially middle-class ones, are involved (Arendell, 2001; Darrah, Freeman, & English-Lueck, 2007; Lareau, 2003). Not only does children's involvement in these activities present a time demand, it also adds a layer of work for parents who arrange transportation and manage the schedule as well as a potential overlay of stress-related symptoms in children (e.g. attention-deficit, psychosomatic symptoms, and other) (Arendell, 2001; Garey, 1999; Hochschild, 1989; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013). Mothers, more so than fathers, have been found to be responsible for organizing and carrying out such labor (Craig, 2006), which seems particularly prevalent among the middle-class who appear intent on the concerted cultivation of children in order to provide them with the best chance for academic and career success over time (Hill, Tranby, Kelly, & Moen, 2013; Lareau, 2003). The term "helicopter parenting" refers to parents' intensive involvement in their children's lives, including participation in organized and structured activities of children, starting in young childhood and continuing throughout emerging adulthood (Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselmann, Zarit, Furstenburg, & Birditt, 2012; Nelson, 2010). While optimal levels of involvement are a matter of some debate, what appears clear is that the level of involvement has increased and that interactive time with children is different than simply being in the presence of their children and providing care without interaction (Crosnoe & Cavanaugh, 2010; Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2010; Milkie, Nomaguchi & Denny, 2015; Offer, 2013).

Work travel literature in studies examining Scandinavia and the United States indicated that close to one-third of full time workers traveled for work (Casinowsky, 2013; Lassen, 2006). There is evidence that jobs requiring work travel have increased in prevalence and has broadened in the types of workers affected (Casinowsky, 2013). Further, there are hints that the gender of the traveling parent makes a difference. In a study by Westman and Etzion (2002), women whose jobs required travel sometimes experienced a sense of respite, suggesting the importance of understanding the experience of work travel by situating men and women in a frame of family responsibilities for household labor and child care (Bianchi, 2011; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2012; Davis & Greenstein, 2004; Greenstein, 2000; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004) along with their work responsibilities. While children's perspectives have not been gathered and the dominant form of data collection has been from the workers only, a series of studies of World Bank employees established that frequent work travel was associated with poor health among workers and also among their families (e.g., more visits to health professionals) (Liese, Mundt, Dell, & Demure, 1997).

The pace of family life today suggests that work travel, along with other job demands, finds family members in a potentially vulnerable situation, as adults in the family are faced with work demands that occur at the same time as intensive parenthood norms (reflected in children's high involvement in activities) (Blair-Loy, 2005; Daly, 2001; Hochschild, 1997; Pugh, 2015). Parents make decisions about how they manage and spend family time (Darrah

et al., 2007). Studies of parents' experiences of time, some of which they control, have revealed strains (Daly, 2001; Hochschild, 1997; Pugh, 2015). Children's perspectives on time provide unique insights on intrafamilial processes, from the viewpoint of family members who are less able to control family time.

Theoretical Underpinning

The broad theoretical underpinning of this work is the social constructionist branch of symbolic interactionism. Daly (1996) applied this theoretical perspective to the concept of family construction of time, by undergirding his inquiry with Durkheim's 1915 assertion that time could be something other than objective: "What the category of time expressed is the time common to the group, a social time, so to speak." (p. 15). More recently, Stephen Marks' (2009) expansionist model suggested that our experience of time aligns with commitment and enjoyment in roles or activities associated with roles. Linking the experience of time with identities and roles related to work and family life is a symbolic interactionism project. Time is regarded as socially constructed, relatively elastic, and in interplay among each individual and their environment (Daly, 1996). Furthermore, each family member's experience of time may be different, grounded in their own identities and roles, expectations, and the larger social demands impinging upon them.

This project forefronts children's experiences of time and compares these experiences to parents' experiences. Our inquiry aims to be in the tradition of Barrie Thorne (2001), a feminist scholar who started her inquiry with a focus on children's experiences from their own perspectives, rather than filtered through their parents. Toward this focus, she carried out an ethnographic study in which she presented the concept of "child time" which was relational and communication based, and she contrasted that with "adult time" which was regulated by the clock and often resulted in conflicts and emotional upset for children who were pushed to modify their views of time to be in line with adult time – during drop-off and pick-up time at a preschool. Similarly, we aim to examine family members' experiences of time in families as we include children who are old enough to talk in an interview setting about family time and their time with parents. With a keen feminist interest in juxtaposing different family members' perspectives and attending to the power dynamics inherent in family relationships (Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2005), we focus on children's voices but incorporate the viewpoints of their parents as we attempt to understand the experience of family time.

We apply a feminist social constructionist perspective inasmuch as we recognize and seek to understand the gendered and generational nature of the experience of time at work and in families. It stands to reason that family members may differ in their experience of time to the extent that they are trying to accomplish different activities within time (e.g., we apply a feminist critical lens to the findings from the literature on household labor and child care that continue to document differences in time use and responsibilities between fathers and mothers; Bianchi et al., 2012; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2006). Work exerts structural influences (such as travel) into how adults might perceive their time and how their time might be negotiated and valued within their families (Daly, 1996; 2001; Tubbs, Roy, & Burton, 2005). Also consistent with feminist perspectives, we validate children's voices and their

perspectives which tend to be muted in the literature on work and family, in line with the growing recognition of children as active participants in their lives (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003). In this inquiry, we examine gendered and generational experiences of time by utilizing a grounded theory methodology that centers on school-aged children's perspectives of family time while incorporating parents' perspectives.

Research Questions

The overarching objective of the paper is to shed light on how middle-class families with a common work demand experience time by drawing from interviews we conducted with family members over the age of seven years old. We interviewed family members separately. In this situation, our general research question is: *How do children and their family members experience time?* We anticipate different perspectives and experiences within families. Specifically, we consider children's perspectives and parents' perspectives from the same families regarding the amount of time they share, their emotions related to how they experience time with each other, and the ways they experience time (including what they do in their time and how they feel about its pace).

In our grounded theory inquiry, we seek to reveal processes that link the within-family perspectives on time and, in line with feminist social constructionist frameworks, we consider different structural and other aspects within and between families that might contribute to similar and divergent perspectives. Our grounded theory analysis resulted in three themes that connect the experience and activities in time to the way children and parents feel about time.

Method

This paper uses data from the Work-Related Travel: Effects of Families and Health research project. This multi-method project assesses the experience of work travel in families in which at least one member frequently travels for work, defined as at least 20 nights per year. This study utilizes the component of the project in which we engaged in qualitative interviews of all family members in the household over the age of 7 years. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into MAXQDA 2007 (Kuckartz, 2007) for analysis.

Sample

The sampling strategy was to be representative of the occupations and industries of frequent work travelers in the National Study of the Changing Workforce (Families and Work Institute, 2008) and MIDUS data set (Brim, Baltes, Bumpass, et al., 1995–1996). It must be noted that the families in this study were generally of middle-class socioeconomic status. See Table 1 for more information regarding the breakdown of occupation and industry in the current sample. To be eligible for the study, families were required to have one adult who frequently traveled overnight for work, in the same job for at least one year, and partnered or married for at least one year. Participants were recruited from the worksites of the frequent traveler, job fairs, and other mechanisms, to identify frequent work travelers (including having them identify others for participation). When a potential participant was identified, they were directed to an online preliminary survey to assure eligibility according to our

criteria. Everyone who completed the online survey was eligible, and reachable by phone was interviewed. A total of 100 families were recruited and participated in the project. All families were interviewed in their home.

The current study used a subsample of the families we interviewed with children in the target age range for the qualitative interviews: 75 children (between the ages of 7–18 who lived with a parent whose job required travel) from 43 families. The 43 families resulted in a total sample size of 161 individuals (86 parents and 75 children). Of the 43 families, 22.7% were families in which both parents identified as traveling frequently for work. The father was the only or most frequent work-traveler in 63.6% of the families, leaving 13.7% of families with mothers and not fathers who traveled. Over 72% of parents had earned at least a Bachelor's degree and 36.4% had a yearly household income of \$120,001 or above (median income category = \$110,001–120,000). There were six parents (7% of sample), who reported not working for pay. The sample was primarily white, non-Latino (85.9%). Children over the age of seven have been described as able to participate productively in interviews (Garbarino & Stott, 1992; Irwin & Johnson, 2005). The average age of children in the study was 12.13 years old ($SD = 3.00$), with 51.3% being female. Table 1 presents means for the travel variables, as well as children and parent ages and family size.

Study Procedures

Families were interviewed using semi-structured interviews in their homes by a research team that included one interviewer for each adult and separate interviewers for children in the family. Children were interviewed individually and provided information about their relationships with family members, their school activities, and their feelings about parents' travel and parents' work. Interviewers underwent an extensive training process in the mechanics and style of interviewing adults and children, including role play, training interviews, observation, listening to recorded interviews, and continuous improvement (see Garbarino & Stott, 1992; Gibson, 2012). Written and verbal consent and assent were obtained at the time of the interview with both children and parents present. Family orientation to the project and individual interviews took approximately two hours. Adult interviews lasted approximately an hour, while child interviews averaged 30 minutes. The multi-method project included self-report standardized questionnaires and a daily diary component in which each child and adult in the household was provided with their own Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) onto which was loaded a daily behavioral self-report questionnaire (these components of the data collection are not addressed in the current paper).

Demographic information such as age and gender of child, family size, which parent(s) traveled for work, and their travel schedule, were drawn from the qualitative data and were included with the transcript information. All family members were given pseudonyms (for ease of connecting family members' interviews, all pseudonyms within each family started with the same letter of the alphabet). All participants from a family were compensated \$50.00 each for their participation. All methods were approved by Institutional Review Boards.

The procedures of the children's interviews were informed by child development knowledge and experience. Consistent with practices in child development, trust and rapport was established by contact being at the family level, in the family home, before the interviewer and the child began their private conversation (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Gibson, 2012). Throughout the child interviews, interviewers were vigilant for signs that the child was getting tired or bored with the interview. Activities including physical activity, responding to questions by the use of figures on laminated boards, sorting cards, and other materials were used as adaptations (Garbarino & Stott, 1992). All child interviewers had extensive experience in working with children in other settings. Specific questions asked of each child were designed to be parallel to the questions posed of parents and were also drawn from Galinsky's (1999) book, *Ask the Children*. These questions included: what would you wish for your mom (asked separately for dad): to have more time, be less stressed, have more money, or to be less tired. Interviewers probed for explanations to what children answered. Further, children were asked about time with each parent (the amount and whether it was rushed or calm) (Galinsky, 1999), to explain why and give an example. Children were asked what the best and worst things are about each parent who traveled, specifically probing for feelings. Identifying feelings was added through the use of a graphic with faces representing a range of emotions (e.g., happy, sad, great, lousy).

Parents were asked parallel questions about the calmest and most rushed time of the day, and were probed for detail about those times. They were also asked about the general pace of their family life, including how much they would like to change the amount of time they had with family, along with other questions (Daly, 1996; 2001). Parents were asked how travel influenced family, including probes for emotions, parallel to the child interviews. Interviewers were trained to probe for detail and feelings, as well as to gauge children's understanding of the vocabulary used (Feldman, 2011).

Data Analytic Process

Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and then imported into the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software program. The file of one child interview was, unfortunately, corrupted and hence rendered unusable. Using grounded theory methodology, the research team read over interviews. Using initial coding as an entry point into the data (Charmaz, 2006), profiles summarizing the initial coding of each interview from each child and parent were developed, which were then abstracted into detailed face sheets for each entire family. This process allowed us to summarize large amounts of information, and made commonalities between members of a family more clear (for example, the Atkins family in which the mother, Ann, said her time with family was rushed because "I'm trying to get home, get supper ready so that everybody can do their activities in the evening," and her daughter, Amy, age 17 said time with mother is rushed because, "Normally I come home from school, practice about 6, and she has to fix supper and go do a report..."). Looking for how children and family members experience time using constant comparative methods within each family and across families (Glaser & Strauss, 2009), the research team arrived at a total of 20 subcategories that fit within 5 categories (see Table 2 for a list of categories and subcategories). The 5 categories matched up well with sensitizing concepts from the literature and theory (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). For example, our category of "never

enough time” matches closely to the theme of “chronic under-supply” of time for families uncovered by Daly (2001, p. 289).

Each transcript was then analyzed using focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) by two researchers to ensure consistency and refine categories and subcategories. All coders met to discuss coding and reach consensus. For example, there were times when one coder coded into the subcategory of “family activities: structured”, but the other coder coded “family activities: unstructured”; both codes fit within the same overarching category; such as for this quote from Tessa Thompson, age 13, “Sometimes when we come home, they’re arguing...So we just kinda have to sit in our rooms basically until everything gets better.” The coders meet and discussed why each one coded the segment they did and reached an agreement; in this case family activities: unstructured. Agreed-upon codes were entered into MAXQDA 2007 (Kuckartz, 2007). As a result of the large quantity of data and the nested nature of the data (160 transcripts nested in 43 families; Humble, 2012), the decision was made to use a qualitative data analysis software program, MAXQDA. A total of 6,075 coded segments were identified. The use of the software program was limited to grouping codes by categories for refinement, identifying patterns of codes within individuals and families, and locating codes within transcripts (at individual and family levels).

The next step (axial coding) analyzed these categories assessing patterns in how categories and subcategories varied and for themes to emerge (LaRossa, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Analysis was aided by the judicious use of charts, grouping together children within families by what they wished for in terms of their parents (e.g., time, less stress), their perspectives about whether they have enough time with each parent, and about whether the time is rushed. These charts incorporated demographic and structural information about families. For example, we used charts in which families with different numbers of children and families who had children only school-aged versus families who had school-aged and younger children were compared, so that we could discern that such information did not make a difference in how time was perceived (for example, regarding age of children in the household, families with children who participated in the study who also had children under 8 years old did not discuss being more rushed for time than families without younger children).

Preliminary theme development was assisted by theoretical coding and theorizing (Charmaz, 2006). To facilitate theoretical coding, we constructed charts and examined codes in MAXQDA to explicitly examine and probe the emerging themes by examining the coded texts and how codes related to each other. These later sets of charts allowed for establishing connections and clear comparison within families, as well as between different families, and for analyzing how salient different issues were for each family member, in their own words. These charts ensured the inclusion of the voices of all members within families as well as all families. From the use of charts, we examined different possibilities on how categories related to each other in the data. For example, we examined how structured activities compared and contrasted to unstructured activities using what individuals said regarding rushed and calm time.

We also examined the face sheets of individuals and families to identify families that had particular patterns of similar and divergent perspectives, and we re-analyzed entire transcripts of individuals within families that related to different combinations of experiences and codes (such as emotions). In order to gain a family perspective, we first examined the categories that children and parents within the same household used when describing their time (i.e. very rushed, somewhat rushed, somewhat calm, and very calm) and then we examined what they said in their individual interviews, profiling families based on the match and mismatch of their responses. Responses related to the pace of time at the family level were analyzed in order to understand the similar and different perspectives of family members on how their time was experienced. For example, we would examine what Seth Smith, age 9, said regarding calm time with his father as “whenever my dad and I are hanging out, you know, just son and father. We sometimes go to the batting cages or play catch with the football” which was coded as calm and unstructured family activities. We would compare Seth’s statement to what the father, Steve Smith, age 48, said in response to a similar question: “The kids have homework. They go to either a tutor or they go to twirling or baseball practice or ballet. The kids have a lot of stuff going on” which was coded as rushed and structured child activities. From a constructivist grounded theory perspective, consistent with our theoretical perspective, we are focusing on how families experience time and why they experience time the way they do (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). The activities of examining charts, face sheets, and re-reading transcripts enabled us to analyze from the individual coded segments to theoretical concepts while focusing on the experiences of the families (Charmaz, 2006, p. 135). From this examination, the themes presented in the results emerged.

Results

Analysis centered on the guiding research question of how children and their parents experience time: how they perceived the amount and pace of time together, how emotions were tied to time experienced together and apart, and how they described the activities done in their time together. The results are organized in order to present a portrait of overall family life from children’s points of view by highlighting three emergent themes regarding how family members experience time at a family level. Three themes emerged: (a) “We Have Enough Time *and* We Want More Time” in which children constructed narratives in such a way that they hold together wanting more time while professing they have enough time with family; (b) “I’m Lonely, I’m Sad, I’m Excited My Parent’s Back” in which children expressed emotions about time with parents while parents seldom expressed their own emotions or recognized emotions of their children; and (c) “Sprinting or Chilling through Time” in which it is revealed that children narrated their experience of time with parents (especially fathers) as calm while parents (especially mothers) actively worked on creating an experience of time in families, such that they (in particular mothers) rarely felt calm. These themes build on the experiences family members described. The first theme reflects how children talked about their experience of time with their parents, while the second theme expands the previous theme to examine the emotional implications of the experience of time within families. The final theme analyzes specific activities and how children and parents considered the quality of time to help explain why family members

experienced time in different ways. Within the presentation of the results, theory is used to interpret the findings.

We Have Enough Time AND We Want More Time

One of the findings revealed by our analytic process was that children and adolescents tended to respond that they have “just enough” time with each parent. That is, 59 children (out of the 74) said “just enough” when asked to choose a category to describe their time with their mother, and 43 said “just enough” about their time with father. However, following this declaration, and throughout the rest of the interview, they provided little supporting evidence or elaboration of how they have enough time, even with probes and requests for examples. Rather than discussing having enough time as would seem evident from the responses to the first question, the focus of children’s stories about their experiences was on *not* having enough time with their parents.

When children’s experiences focused on not having enough time with their parents, two explanations emerged. The first and most frequent explanation was that children were not having enough time with their parents as a result of the general unavailability of their parents, as could be seen from children’s interviews and from a family-level analysis. This lack of time was perceived as a result of parents’ travel, long work hours, a “mismatch” between their parents’ schedules and their schedules (particularly with after school activities), and a belief that they could not interrupt their parents when they were busy. For example, Willa Williams, age 10, (all family members were given pseudonyms with first and last names beginning with the same letter of the alphabet) whose father has been a long-haul trucker for 15 years and the primary traveler, described her time with her dad as impeded by work and travel: “We don’t get to see him very often, and when he does come, he’s here for maybe a day, and that’s usually in the afternoon, so we don’t get a full day with him.” The “long arm of the job” and the demands that jobs placed on their parents were forefront on children’s minds, reflecting the 24/7 work pace and culture today. These forces illuminated the precarious position of children (family members who do not earn income) and the value ascribed to those with the most income earning potential as socialist feminist theories would suggest.

In addition to children mentioning not having enough time because their parent was not available, they discussed wanting more time with their parents when parental time was not otherwise engaged with activities. They described a general desire for interaction with their parents as well as mentioning specific activities they would like to do with their parents. Some children noted that they thought their dad was only home for a short time and then had to leave again, some said that they thought dad did not even really live with them, and that their home did not seem right when dad was at home rather than traveling. For example, Renee Robl, age 8, reported that time with her traveler dad Rick, a regional manager for a food sales company, was somewhat rushed and she wished for more time with her dad because “most of the time he goes out of town and everything...because he travels a lot.” The father appeared to have an accurate idea of his daughter’s perspective, saying: “If you talk to the girls, I work all the time” (Rick, age 42). While he understood his daughter’s

perspectives, he talked about staying home and avoiding going out with friends (“hanging out”) when he was not on a trip.

Few children linked not having enough time with their sense of the quality of their relationships with their parents. When children did discuss this link, they reported that even though they did not get to spend as much time together as they would like, they still had a good relationship, and that having more time together would strengthen their relationship (for example, by being able to talk more). For example, Anthony Andrews, age 13, whose father was a senior director for a business development technology firm, talked about the amount of time he had with his dad even though he was framing his declaration of a good relationship with his father: “During the week and on the weekend, I know it’s not his fault, but I feel like I have too little and try to make every minute count and what we do is fun.” Abner, the father, mentioned that he thought “Anthony is at an age where he needs me around more...” He mentioned that Anthony and his mother clashed a lot when he was not around. Travel has been a part of this family’s life since Anthony was born, and Anthony has 2 younger sisters. There was a sense of wistfulness in his description and the answers provided by other children. In the Ulrich family, in which the father traveled for work as an anesthesiologist, daughter Uma, age 12, elaborated: “We never spend, I mean, we very rarely spend time with each other, and it would be nice to have more time for him to, to just spend with him or things at my school and who my friends are...” In responding to what spending more time together would look like and how not spending time together affected her, Uma elaborated: “We’d get along a lot better. We fight a lot...It kinda makes me sad ‘cause, because, like when my friends start to talk to me about their dad, I can’t say anything back.” Her father, the family’s primary traveler who stated that he gave up most of his free time for his work-related activities and that he worked to arrange his travel schedule on weekends to accommodate their weekday schedules, when asked about schedules and spending time together as a family, identified dinnertime: “And, maybe a little bit in the evening, Unis, Uma, and I will watch TV together or something. Uma and I [spending time together]? Pfff...not very often.”

Juxtaposing answers to a fixed question about their time with parents with the narrative information children provided revealed the meaning children make of time with parents, and the construction of meaning related to family time more broadly, a point on which we elaborate later (Daly, 1996; 2001; Nelson, 2010). Differences in children’s perspectives on time with each parent were uncovered, with far more children talking about insufficient time with their fathers than their mothers, in part a reflection of the fact that men were perceived to be main breadwinners (though many women in the sample were also breadwinners), as well as a reflection of gendered parenting (Bianchi et al., 2007; Coltrane, 2010). We note as well the power some fathers appeared to exercise about how they spent their time with their children, a point we extend in the final theme that concerns family activities and pace of time.

I’m Lonely, I’m Sad, I’m Excited My Parent’s Back

Both the children and their parents were asked specifically for feelings regarding how the work experience of travel and the coming and going of a parent influenced family life. Most

children identified feelings associated with not having time with their parents and how they felt related to their parents' comings and goings. Family time was different when the parent who traveled was not home. For example, children reported that family life was too quiet so that they were lonely without one parent at home; other children reported that family life was rushed or even chaotic without both parents to manage household and child activities, so the children felt overwrought or anxious. In the Hamlin family, a blended family with five children in which both parents traveled (Helyne working for an auto auction company and Howard working as a retail supervisor and a sport referee), the 13 year old daughter, Heaven, said, "I just wish she didn't travel sometimes, cause I just feel like, 'Man, it's like so boring around here.' "Cause she usually brings up action (laughs)."

Rarely did a child talk about the ways their parents attempted to alleviate feelings of boredom or anxiety. Anthony Andrews, age 13, said his mother, who volunteered at a school two days a week, worked to construct positive emotions during times when his father was traveling as a Senior Director of Business Development for a technology company. "She tries to minimize the amount of time that we are alone at home doing stuff that is not that fun while my dad is not here." During his interview, he also mentioned his mother's guilt relying on someone else to care for him, "We used to have a babysitter that my sister loved, but my mom feels guilty calling her all the time." Though his mother's interview gave little indication of this effort or her feeling of guilt, it is noteworthy that her son presented a picture of their family time when the dad was away as trying to fill gaps and keep them positively entertained. Children revealed how parents constructed the experience of time through the recognition on how the experience of family changed when one parent left the physical interaction of the family.

Children also reported feelings of sadness and missing their parent when parents were not home. "I get really sad and sometimes I get really angry and I start crying." (Fabian Fry, age 10). Although central to the experience of time apart from parents by children, missing and feeling sad regarding family time was not only related to travel. Parents working late hours or being unavailable for interaction also prompted negative emotions. In the Graves family, the mother, who was 37 and director of global accounts for a company, was the frequent work traveler. The rest of the family includes a father, who was an operations manager, and two children, one of whom was a preschooler, and the other was Gwen, age 9. Gwen described her feelings about the unavailability of her mother by saying: "It sort of makes me feel—Sometimes she'll ask for a few more minutes [when she attempted to get her mother's attention away from her work computer] and then say it again and again. I feel like she doesn't love the time with me." Getting parents' attention away from their computer was mentioned by several children and admitted as a problem by a few fathers.

Finally, children expressed concern and worry when parents were traveling. Children mentioned being concerned for their parent's safety during travel. Children centered their concerns on the safety of either the traveling parent or the parent who remained at home. Priscilla Potter, age 8, whose mother traveled internationally for work in a technology company, explained: "We are really sad when she goes, and each night we pray that she's safe on her airplane and she comes and arrives safely." Nisha Norris, age 11, described how her mother, Natalie, a stay at home mother, age 31, did not feel safe without her dad,

Nathaniel age 32 who traveled for his job as a mechanical engineer: “She put her blow-up bed in her room, because she doesn’t feel safe without Dad. She wants us to sleep with her and she puts a green pot in a chair under the door (laughs) so no one can get in. I think it makes Mom feel safer to have someone in the room with her. I’m sure it makes my brothers [age 9 and 6] feel safer too. It’s fun.” Other children talked about taking care to close draperies, lock doors, and some spoke of co-sleeping while a father was on a trip. Feelings regarding safety were echoed in the reunion experiences of children. Zane Zeneberg, age 12, said, “It makes me feel a whole lot better to know that he’s safe at home.”

Children mentioned feeling relieved, happy, and excited when a traveling parent returned. Curtis Carver, age 14, explained that things were exciting when mom returned from a trip because “I’m happy to see her.” Positive emotions surrounding returning from a business trip were echoed in the responses of parents. Parents mentioned “I just want to be back.” However, distinct from children, parents’ reasons for wanting to return from a trip were grounded in responses related to the stress and work associated with travel. This stress accumulation was echoed in children’s reports on what parents did when they returned. Zack Zeneberg, age 17, whose father was a long haul cattle driver, said, “He still does everything with us, but whenever we are home, all he does is sleep. He goes to our games, and he goes to the grocery store and all that stuff, but he just sleeps when we are home.”

Children provided several varied emotional responses to family time, in contrast to parents, who rarely described emotional responses or feelings related to family time. When parents did acknowledge emotions, it was about an emotion experienced by a child, such as “the kids miss him when he travels” or “the kids miss me.” More often, the parents reflected that travel did not bother the children because the children were used to the travel experience or children were at a developmental stage in which they no longer wished to spend time with their parents anyway. Congruent with this notion is that, when emotion was connected to children by parents and when parents reported an emotional response, it was connected to having younger children in the household.

Whereas children discussed missing parents, parents discussed missing events. The only time they said they “missed” things was “missing out on child activities” not emotion, which is interesting in light of the parents’ focus on structured activities. Parents with children who were, for example, seniors in high school, did talk about missing activities of senior year (in a sense, they were referring to their child’s developmental life course and the notion that their child would only have one senior year). But they wrapped up their notions about missing events with the idea of a trade-off between being home more and making more money. Parents downplayed their children’s emotions related to missing them, even saying they hardly noticed they were away. Nowhere in the parents’ interviews did a reader get the sense of poignancy conveyed in the children’s interviews.

Sprinting or Chilling through Time

The tempo of family experiences in time was readily described and elaborated on within the interviews we conducted and offered a unique lens into how family members’ viewpoints on time contrasted and converged. From doing this, we saw that overall, being busy was a constant, due to activities. The theme addressed how some family members (especially

children but also fathers) could see time as calm and relaxed, in part because parents (primarily mothers) constructed the time to be experienced by different family members at a certain pace. The nuance of this theme is that it was possible, indeed common, for children to feel relaxed and parents to feel hurried, and in these cases, parents could talk about how they construct time so as to be experienced (at least by some family members) as relaxed. We analyzed the responses to pace at the family level in order to understand the similar and different perspectives family members had on how their time was experienced. It should be pointed out that a minority (less than half) of family members responded in the same way to how rushed or calm their time was. This analysis revealed a difference between children's and parents' perspectives. The most typical mismatch within families was children reporting that time was somewhat calm and parents reporting that time was somewhat rushed. This dynamic occurred, we found, because parents were focusing on *doing activities within their time* while children focused more on *how time is experienced* rather than *what activities are accomplished* in time.

Interviews provided numerous family-level examples that illustrated children's feelings of calm combined with less-than-calm parents. When asked about overall family pace, Samantha Schnacke, a 38 year-old traveling retail sales field developer, said: "I'd like to meet the family who says their time is calm" – yet her children all categorized their time with her as calm. Her son, Saben, age 15, reported that time is very calm: "Usually when I'm talking to her, she'll be on her computer. If we have something to tell her, then she'll listen. She can stop what she is doing and ...she pays attention to what we say" with her daughter Sophie, age 9, agreed: "Because mostly if she'll go to the store or something, I'll go with her, and we'll talk on the way there and back."

Another family, the Naylor's, (in which the husband was the main traveler, working as a loss prevention manager in the insurance industry) exhibited a similar dynamic. From the perspective of the children, time was not described as being rushed. Noah, age 9, categorized time as somewhat calm with his mother, because "Well, she helps me a lot with my pigs, so that helps it stay calm too." Naomi, the 38 year old mother working as a nurse, declared: "I've got three kids all under the age of 9 ... all three of them are involved in different activities. So we have one night a week that somebody is not in an activity..." However, she discussed her viewpoint that how she responded to the need to get children places could occur in a manner that left everyone feeling rushed, or it could occur in a different way. The father, 38 year old Nicholas, agreed that time was rushed, explaining, "If it was just the job, then it would not be rushed at all. But when you throw in all the other things we have going ... [provides listing of various sports activities] ... so you know, it's rushed because of all those other things in there."

Parents' relentless lists of tasks to be accomplished in time—Parents converged with each other within and across families on of the experience of time being crammed with activities ("compressed" as one father put it) and as a result, they experienced time in terms not having enough and the time they had being rushed. Parents by and large mentioned structured child activities, while their children mentioned unstructured activities as they spent time with their parents. When parents focused on structured activities, particularly child activities, they perceived time as rushed. Most parents delivered a long list of activities

in which all their children were involved and their own schedules often included evening meetings that one parent or the other had to attend for their jobs. One example came from the Thompsons, in which the father was a 57 year old litigator lawyer and the mother was not employed. This family had two children, 13 year old Tessa and 8 year old son Tye. Even with this relatively simple family structure in which the mother did not have paid job demands, the dad reported time was rushed because “usually after work, somebody has a meeting, somebody’s got an athletic commitment, somebody’s got a school commitment, I’ve got a community board meeting or some other kind of meeting. Tina’s (his wife) got a meeting,” illustrating that time after work and school was filled with structured activities by all family members, including extra job demands typical of middle-class occupations.

Conversely, parents and children who chose calm as the category to describe their family time mentioned unstructured family and child activities. For parents, the connection between unstructured activities and the calm time was related to three different experiences. Experiencing calm time related to unstructured family and child activities was something parents seemed to engage in only after all the structured activities were done for the day. Paula Potter, a 31 year old service delivery manager whose husband traveled as a sales manager for a food company, mentioned that her calmest time of day was just after her four children, whose ages ranged from 18 months to 8 years, have had their baths and before they put them to bed. She remarked it is calm “just because everybody’s there. All of the ‘whatever’ we had to get done that day is done, and sorta just kind of enjoying the time.”

Paula’s reflection of calm time was also illustrative of a second experience of calm time being tied to unstructured time for parents. This time occurred when everyone in the family was together, such as dinner time, time when they would play together (such as playing Wii or board games), and general hanging-out time. Finally, the third experience parents reflected on is that they experienced calm time when the family was engaging in parallel leisure activities, especially watching TV and to a lesser extent, reading. The Frys mentioned this throughout their transcripts. The mother, Fawn age 37 and a CEO of a marketing and promotional items business, reported that nobody was rushed after school, providing an example of what the family was doing before the interview: “I was laying on the couch reading a book, they [father Fernand, age 37 and a senior application engineer who travels for work, and son Francis, age 6] were looking at something, and Fabian was on the computer.” Fabian, age 10, mentioned a similar pattern of interaction at night, “We do our homework and then we watch TV. ... On Saturday mornings, we come into his [the father’s] room and he’s laying there...we get to go in his room and watch TV.”

These findings are reflective of previous literature that views the ideal notion of family time as something unstructured that is relaxing (Daly, 2001; Darrah et al., 2007). Furthermore, this finding ties into the theoretical framework of social constructionism. People attempted to make meaning of their time and used different processes when they made meaning of unstructured time as compared to structured time. Unstructured time may have had similar meaning for all family members, if they were engaging in a task together or in the same room or area during unstructured time. Compare unstructured time at home to structured activities which, due to their schedule constraints, were more likely to be regarded as rushed (imagine a parent rushing to get the child to an athletic practice on time) and in which

participation levels among all family members might have vary (e.g., the child at an athletic practice versus the parent).

Family time is talking time—Communication was a salient manner through which unstructured activities were connected to the experience of children perceiving time with their parents, especially their mothers, to be calm. Having a parent who made time for talking or was available for a conversation if needed was important to children. For example, in the Smith family (the father is a primary traveler and CEO for a technology company), 11 year old Sadie elaborated on her response that she did not have enough time with her mother, by saying, “Normally she is hardly able to sit down and talk.” The importance of time to talk was underscored in many children’s interviews. Inasmuch as symbolic interaction suggests that meaning making is subjective and relates to how interactions are experienced, we could see that a parent making efforts to communicate with their children during their time together assisted in the child constructing a calm and relaxed meaning around their interaction. Such efforts may not happen automatically — though the efforts involved might be apparent to the parent, they may not be obvious to the child. Furthermore, the efforts could be conceived as a form of invisible household and emotional labor (Erickson, 2005), which tends to occur more for women than for men, but also for which there are heightened gendered expectations.

A family that illustrated the child’s perspective on communication and the mother’s explanation of what she did to create an environment rich for communication was the Browns. In this family, the father of the two children, Bambie age 13 and Bonnie age 9, was the primary traveler and president of a technology company. The mother Beth, age 37, who worked part time as receptionist for a dentist office, classified time as somewhat calm, explaining: “It’s my choice. I get up a little earlier on the days I go to work, and I get myself mostly ready, so that by when they get up, I’m fixing them breakfast and helping them get ready for school, and that just kind of helps the whole mornings go smoother. So, I don’t have to, I’m not rushing around and getting me ready and trying to get them ready and trying to get them out the door and things like that.” Her daughter Bambie, who chose “somewhat calm” to describe her time with her mother, explained: “We’re both really organized and we both keep a schedule. So, we know when we need to be some place and we’re not rushing around.” She categorized time with her father as very calm, elaborating: “We just chill out. He lays on the couch at night. He just stays home and watches sports, you know? Just kinda like chill. ... We play Wii. We like the Wii. Sometimes we drive around. Sometimes, we run. It depends.” Note that she did not highlight communication with her father, but rather, an unstructured, relaxed activity, sometimes involving interacting with her father and sometimes simply being in the same room.

Time with their mothers, when discussed in terms of being calm, centered on talking. Mothers could be seen to actively plan and arrange to construct time with their children when they could talk. It appeared that children and parents were co-constructing their experiences of time with each other differentially based on their individual focus within their interactions. Family members constructed meaning out of time based on the gendered expectations of parents. For example, fathers were not expected to plan, orchestrate, or be responsible for as many activities as was expected of mothers. This differentiation in

responsibility was especially evident if the fathers were the primary work travelers and family patterns had been established that required less involvement from fathers in instrumental tasks (though family members reported fathers carpooling, chauffeuring, and attending practices and games – “involved fathers” by most measures). Conversely, the expectations of mothers to run the household were reflected in concerns about family pace and rhythm, especially when fathers were on the road.

Conclusion

The families in this study revealed time crunches and the children in the study articulated a different perspective on family time that enriches what we knew about family time from parents’ perspectives in the literature (Daly, 2001; Mattingly & Sayer, 2006; Snyder, 2007). One of the most important contributions of our analysis was the ability to analyze children’s perspectives on their family life and to make connections at the family level between family members in how they experienced work and family life. The themes revealed several issues that were salient to children but appeared to be not on parents’ radar screens. In this way, this paper adds missing voices to the study of families and work and families and time.

Children considered the amount and quality of time they had with their parents. Then evaluated their time with fathers quite differently from how they evaluated their time spent with their mothers, and these gendered differences reflect, at least in part, the value in which men and their time is assigned, such that fathers’ “just being there” at home is highly valued. Previous literature has found fathers engaging in leisure with their children; in this work, we uncovered how much children valued unstructured time with fathers (Bianchi et al., 2012; Coltrane & Adams, 2008). This research demonstrated the importance to children of time to talk with mothers, and how such time comes about through mothers’ construction of their time. According to the literature, mothers spend more time with children than fathers (Bianchi, 2011; Bianchi et al., 2012), and in this research, we uncovered that mothers not only need to spend time with their children, they need to establish a communicative and calm atmosphere to earn children’s praise in terms of time.

Children did not mention the work parents did on their behalf, which accounted for much of the mismatches between parental and children perspectives. No value was ascribed by children to such work; they just articulated that “we are busy,” not that their parents were investing in their future by encouraging involvement in athletics, music, and church activities. This labor parents do on behalf of their children is consistent with feminist examinations about the lack of value for care work, the invisible work of organizing the household, and the work women do (England, 2005). Thorne (2001) argued that “child time” had a different quality than “adult time” and our findings reflect such a qualitative difference.

The different ways children regarded father time as compared to mother time also can be scrutinized from a feminist perspective. The quality of time with mothers was seen as rushed, because this work is largely unacknowledged and unvalued. As children reported on enjoying unstructured time with fathers, a discrepancy between how children experience time with mothers versus fathers emerged, with mothers viewed as “rushing around”

because they were doing work for the child and household, whereas fathers were considered “pretty chill” as children focused on their unstructured leisure.

The findings are readily interpreted via feminist and social constructionist perspectives (Daly, 1996; Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2005). Children have little power in how the family spends their time – while it might be thought that children have a say in what activities they engage in, the literature on parenting today indicates parents have a great deal of power in structuring and making decisions about children’s lives (Lareau, 2003; Shannon, 2006). However, parents do not necessarily feel powerful – they feel unable to limit their work involvement, they feel obligated to travel for work, and they strive to uphold standards of intensive parenting including being available to their children, for example, by attending children’s events, though not necessarily being available for conversation with their children (Coltrane & Adams, 2008; Cooper, 2014; Pugh, 2015). The work role limits control to some extent, and parents varied in the amount of flexibility they had at work, though all families were touched by the relatively rigid demand of work travel. This predominantly upper-middle class sample did experience work hours and workplace flexibility more than many families, combined with high work commitment, comparable to those in the Conley (2009) and Darrah and colleagues’ (2007) samples.

Control over the experience of family time illustrates the agency, and the limits of the agency, that family members have regarding family time. Interpreted through a feminist and a symbolic interactionist lens, adults are operating within the constraints of their paid work and within the expectations of family roles, while also linking these expectations with their lived experience and their ability to produce interactions with their family members (Zvonkovic, Manoogian, & McGraw, 2001; Daly, 1996; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2005). Parents were “doing family time” in a similar way to how people have been revealed to “do gender,” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) within constraints and with effort, as well as attentive to the performative nature of doing family time (Butler, 1990), including visible involvement at children’s activities (Coltrane & Adams, 2008; Garey, 1999). In our interviews, mothers were more aware of this control than other family members. Mothers made choices related to their family time, such as to get up early, to organize their day, and to make themselves available to their children by being responsive. Control for fathers came from being available to their children in unstructured activities at home. Note that fathers could opt out of many household task responsibilities and orchestrating household tasks, giving them access to “chilling” with their children.

Parents control family time within the constraints of paid work, how they conceptualized the parent role, and how busy they believed they should keep their children. Children, however, were less able to control family time, and in some ways, their parents’ work situations required them to be flexible about time with their parents, even when the boundaries of this flexibility were stretched taut (Pugh, 2015). Children sometimes expressed wistfulness and longing for a different quality of time with parents. How children dealt with the conundrum of wanting more time, but valuing time with their parents and loving their parents, was through their emotions. Children made a certain type of meaning of their parents’ control over time for their families when their parents established a slower pace of family time and engaged in more unstructured time, facilitating communication with each other, in which

case children were able to reconcile their experiences with the positive view they wanted to hold about their families and time. In other cases, when children felt rushed and that their parents did not take time to communicate with them or know about their lives, they struggled with reconciling their experiences with the view they wanted to hold about their family time.

The literature on family ideology and the views people want to have about their families has focused on adults' experiences, as parents demonstrated the difficulty of holding to a myth of a certain type of family (Daly, 1996, 2003; Galinsky, 1999; Hochschild, 1997). This research demonstrates difficulty children experience, as they hold close to loving their parents and feeling that they have a good quality relationship with their parents, yet they acknowledge that they want more time with their parents and sometimes express uncertainty about how much their parents value the time with them. The poignancy of the contrast between the family image we hold and the way children experience family time is illustrated in this research.

As with all research, this analysis is not without limitations. The sample, while reasonably reflecting the demographics of frequent work travelers, was predominately of high socioeconomic status. The sample was a two-parent sample and all participants in the larger study who had children were in heterosexual partnerships. Again, these limitations are typical of frequent work travelers with children. A sample of working class families would be a useful supplement. This sample also reflected the gendered nature of frequent work travel, so that more intensive scrutiny of the family dynamics when mothers travel would require a different sampling strategy. Lastly, there are methodological limitations to the qualitative design of this study, for example, an ethnographic analysis could have revealed the pace of time without being filtered through parents' and children's viewpoints, whereas the approach in this analysis contributed novel features in terms of the positioning of children's voices.

Given the age of the children, it is possible that the totality of parental work demands (e.g. long hours, high accessibility to worksite, working with teams on projects with unpredictable timelines as well as travel; Cooper, 2014; Pugh, 2015) are experienced by children as a package. Younger children might have a harder time distinguishing travel from generally long work hours than older children (Gibson, 2012). And it may well be that the totality of parental work demands sets a pattern for family life even when the frequent work traveler is at home. In this way, the voices of children and parents in the study seem consistent with the trends in the literature (Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2006; Darrah et al., 2005; Jacobs & Gerson, 2001) related to time demands of highly educated workers and upper-middle class families.

This paper developed several insights on family life among a group of families in which at least one parent had an extreme work demand. Drawing from social constructionist symbolic interactionism, the findings demonstrated how children view mothers and fathers navigating between somewhat rigid work demands and their family lives and the emotional consequences for children of how parents arrange family time. In addition to the contributions to feminist thought in revealing gendered parenting, the project also employed a feminist perspective in the value in which children's points of view were held. Obtaining a

family perspective by interviewing all family members over 7 years old in each household allowed for multiple voices to be accounted for and heard. It revealed contrasts between how children wanted to think about their family time and what they wished for and experienced emotionally. It revealed contrasts between how parents experienced and constructed family time, in particular, mothers and fathers, as well as between parents and children. The benefits of family-level data are great: divergence in perspective shows the vantage point of each family member, and keeping account of the entire family group provides a coherent view of the family dynamic, allowing for a rich understanding on family life when there are high work demands.

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Table 1

Sample Characteristics

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mother's nights away per year	52.83	32.75
Father's nights away per year	74.16	67.37
Mother's average trip length	2.49	1.68
Father's average trip length	3.80	3.46
Mother's age	40.70	5.41
Father's age	43.84	6.69
Age of children	12.15	2.79
Number of children in household	2.65	0.90

Table 2

Code System for Families' Experience of Time

Category	Subcategory
Domain	
	Work
	School
	Child Activities - Structured
	Child Activities - Unstructured
	Family Activities - Structured (lessons, practices, meetings)
	Family Activities - Unstructured (watching tv, playing games, running)
	Dyadic Intimate Relationship
	Child Care - Younger Children
	Child Care - Older Children
	Household Labor
	Solitary
Routines	
	Adult Routine
	Child Care Routine
Experience of Time	
	Rushed Time
	Calm Time
	Not Enough Time
	Enough Time
	Stressed/Hassled
Travel Schedule	
	Unstructured/Spontaneous
	Structured
Travel Status	
	Preparing for a trip
	Away
	Home