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**PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILDREN: THE IMPACT OF GENDER
IDEOLOGIES**

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ABSTRACT

Although prior social science research has established the ability of gender role ideologies to influence the domestic division of labor, it has neglected to disentangle their potentially unique impact on paternal involvement with children. Past research that examines the influence of gender ideology on parenting behaviors does not acknowledge the potential differences that may result from accounting for each parent's gender ideology. Using both waves of the National Survey of Families and Households, I assess the impact of mother's and father's gender ideology on two measures of paternal involvement. Whereas egalitarian fathers demonstrate greater involvement than traditional fathers, the gender ideology of the mother failed to predict paternal involvement. Egalitarian mothers do not appear to successfully negotiate greater father involvement.

Keywords: fathers, gender ideology, parental involvement

In recent years, social scientists have increasingly emphasized the importance of father involvement with children (Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998; Amato, 1998; Blankenhorn, 1995; Friedan, 1997; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; McBride & Mills, 1993; Starrels, 1994). This is easily understood, as increased paternal involvement may contribute to the overall development of children (Coltrane, 1996), alleviate the burden of the second shift experienced by many women (see Hochschild, 1989), and improve the family's overall well-being (Glass, 1998). Thus, the importance of assessing the determinants of fatherhood cannot be understated considering the significant implications father involvement has on both marital equity and child well-being.

Research reflects that gender ideology is an important factor to consider in the analysis of determinants of paternal involvement in childcare (Aldous et al., 1998). We know that gender ideologies represent how individuals view the appropriate or standard roles employed by men and women, which in turn affects their own behavior (McHale & Huston, 1984). This is seemingly affirmed by research demonstrating how husbands with egalitarian beliefs do more housework than traditional men (Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz, 1992). However, it is also apparent that the behaviors of spouses do not always correspond to their respective ideologies (Blaisure & Allen, 1995). For example, research suggests that greater paternal involvement with the family violates some women's perception that family is primarily a woman's domain (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Similarly, Greenstein (1996) demonstrates that the gender ideology of wives may prevent some husbands from being as involved as they would like to be in household labor.

In these latter instances, it may be that the gender ideology of a traditional wife leads to a lack of reinforcing behavior for a less traditional husband that attempts to become involved with his children. Her belief that a man is not capable of nurturing or caring for children may manifest itself in behaviors that limit the amount of her husband's involvement. Evidence supports the notion that mothers may prefer that fathers do not become more involved with their children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Glass, 1998; Hochschild, 1989). Although greater paternal involvement may be welcome by many women, it may be their perception of the fathers' family work skills that prevent it (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

Childcare as a Distinct Concept

The primary goal of this study is to determine whether the influence of fathers' gender ideology on paternal involvement is contingent upon the gender ideology of mothers. Related empirical evidence supports this notion with regard to the division of labor and traditionally female tasks (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Greenstein, 1996). Men with egalitarian or traditional gender ideologies contribute little to domestic labor when they are married to women with traditional gender attitudes. Thus, it appears evident that the traditional ideology of the wife may have a significant inhibiting impact on the tasks men do within the home. This project investigates whether a similar process occurs with regard to parenting.

Thus far, much research analyzing the impact of gender ideology and the division of labor has a blurred focus in its assumption that housework and childcare have the same predictors (Deutsch, Lussier, & Servis, 1993; Starrels, 1994). Some works have combined elements of childcare and housework in their measures of domestic labor or

family work (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Greenstein, 1996). Although there is an overlap in activities, each possesses unique elements. Indeed, the impact of neglecting housework is not of the same magnitude as neglecting childcare (Deutsch et al., 1993). Also, the consequences of becoming directly involved with one's own children, primarily intrinsic rewards (Deutsch et al., 1993), may provide men with more motivation to be actively engaged in childcare than ordinary household chores. Thus, analyzing childcare as an isolated concept, despite its connection with domestic labor, is an important step in disentangling distinct determinants and influences.

Although some studies have distinguished the concepts of domestic labor and childcare, they fail to examine how the variable combinations of gender ideologies between parents differ in effect (Aldous et al., 1998; Deutsch et al., 1993). Their basic findings using just the main effect approach are contradictory. Deutsch et al. (1993) offer support for the notion that a father's nontraditional gender ideology predicts greater paternal involvement, but Aldous and associates (1998) do not replicate this finding. These competing results serve as a basis for the argument that the use of a model accounting for both parents' gender ideologies is needed.

This study improves on previous research in two important ways. First, gender ideology measures are provided by both members of the married couple. Past research that examines the influence of gender ideology on parenting behaviors has neglected to acknowledge the potential differences that may result from accounting for each parent's gender ideology (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Bird, Bird, & Scruggs, 1984). Second, this study employs two measures of paternal involvement, offering a more broad assessment of fathering. The first measure, breadth of involvement, entails paternal interaction with

children in several different activities. The second measure addresses father's proportional time spent with children in these activities. This relative measure offers an effective method of assessing paternal involvement (Pleck, 1997), and parallels other gender ideology studies that assess measures of housework (Greenstein, 1996).

HYPOTHESES

Gender is a central concept to the organization of the family (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; DeLuccie, 1995; Hochschild, 1989; Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmiede, & Hall, 1996) and provides a justification for a focus on gender ideologies. Although research indicates that traditional ideas about gender are a likely influence of family related behaviors, it remains unclear if and how each spouse's gender ideologies influence paternal involvement in household labor, particularly involvement with children. This study focuses on the potentially inhibiting effects wives' gender ideology may have on paternal involvement with children. I anticipate that fathers married to egalitarian mothers will demonstrate greater paternal involvement than fathers married to traditional mothers. Furthermore, because I expect mothers' gender ideology to be the primary influence on paternal involvement, I do not anticipate egalitarian fathers to demonstrate more involvement than traditional fathers, net of the mother's gender ideology.

To properly assess the influence of parental gender ideologies, it is necessary to account for other potentially confounding measures. Based on prior literature, characteristics of the parents and child may influence parent-child relations and parenting. These factors include age, race, education, hours of employment, mother's relative income, and employment status (Aldous et al., 1998; Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz,

1992; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Starrels, 1994). Also, the gender composition, age of the child, and number of children may also play a pivotal role in paternal involvement (Harris & Morgan, 1991). Each of these characteristics is included in the analyses.

DATA AND METHOD

This study utilizes data from the two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a multistage probability sample of the non-institutionalized adult US population (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). The first wave of data was collected between the years 1987-1988 and includes 13,008 respondents. In addition to the primary interview of the main respondent, a self-enumerated questionnaire was used to collect data from a secondary respondent, the main respondent's spouse or partner. This is a notable improvement on surveys that rely on the speculative reports of only one spouse. In addition, the NSFH data are appropriate for this investigation because they include items that allow for well rounded measures of paternal involvement. The items included in the measurements of paternal involvement adequately represent activities varying in depth and style of interaction. This element satisfies criticism that findings of greater paternal involvement may represent minimal levels of interaction (LaRossa, 1988).

This study focuses on the parental behavior of biological married parents with at least one child less than 13 years old at time one ($n = 2142$). 6.5% of these respondents are excluded due to a lack of valid gender ideology measures ($n = 2003$). More than 71% of these subjects were re-interviewed and continuously married at time two ($n = 1428$). Of this subsample, over 76% were retained due to valid data on both paternal

involvement measures (n = 1088). The nature of these exclusions limit generalizability to continuously married biological parents. Hence, the results are not applicable to various family forms, including single parents and step-families. Furthermore, the dependent measures for paternal involvement refer to only focal children that are older than 5 years old. This inherently prevents generalizability to paternal behaviors involving preschool aged children and infants.

Table 1 about here

Of the families retained for analyses, approximately 30% of mothers and fathers were classified as egalitarian and close to a third of mothers and fathers are classified as traditional. The sample included 84.6% white fathers, nearly 40 years of age and at least 12 years of education. Fathers worked an average of 43 hours per week, and mothers worked an average of over 24 hours per week. Only 70.5% of mothers were employed, with mother's income comprising almost a quarter of the total couple's income. Almost 80% of families have at least one son, and more than one child. The average age of the youngest child is 8 years.

Ordinary least squares regression is used to assess the impact of each parent's gender ideology on paternal involvement, in terms of breadth and proportional hours. The analyses will determine if paternal involvement is best explained by accounting for the gender ideology of both parents.

Dependent Variables

I operationalized paternal involvement with children in two ways. First, fathers' involvement was assessed in terms of breadth of interaction with his child(ren). This measure represents an index of the various types and frequency of the father's

involvement. Specifically, this measure reflects the frequency in which fathers engage in: (a) leisure activities away from the home (picnics, movies, sports, etc.), (b) at home working on a project or playing together, (c) having private talks, (d) helping with reading or homework, and (e) watching television or videos. Responses ranged from '1' never or rarely to (6) almost everyday. The alpha correlation for these items measured .78. The score of breadth of involvement with the child(ren) is the sum of the individual items, divided by six. This results in a range of 1 to 6. This measurement contributes a more complete representation of paternal involvement by including items that may signify potentially low levels of interaction (watching TV) and items that suggest more intimacy (private talks).

Second, fathers' involvement with children is assessed in terms of proportional hours spent with his child(ren), relative to the mother's involvement. Whereas prior research has measured absolute hours of only father's involvement (Aldous et al., 1998), this measurement reflects the relational nature of parenting. This measurement is represented by the ratio of total hours spent by the father in the aforementioned activities to the total hours spent by both the mother and the father in these activities. The scores of this measure range from 0 to 1 and then are converted to a percent to make the regression coefficients more interpretable.

Independent Variables

The primary independent variable is gender ideology. The extent to which men and women adhere to traditional or nontraditional gender ideologies is measured with a four-item scale from the first wave of the NSFH. The gender ideology score is based on the responses of support to the following: (a) It is much better if the man earns the living

and the woman takes care of the home and family, (b) Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed, (c) How much do you approve/disapprove of mothers who work full-time when their youngest child is under age 5, (d) How much do you approve/disapprove of mothers who work part-time when their youngest child is under age 5. Responses are recoded so that higher scores reflect more traditional attitudes. This coding scheme follows that used by Aldous and colleagues (1998) in a study on the division of labor. Next, scores for each item are standardized to a mean of zero with a standard deviation of one, and then summed.

Both of the individual alpha reliabilities for the mother's and father's gender ideology scores are .77. For ease of interpretation, dummy variables were created to distinguish traditional parents from non-traditional (egalitarian) parents. Parents with a gender ideology score one-half of a standard deviation above the mean were coded as being traditional, whereas those with scores below this point were coded as egalitarian (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). Respondents with scores between these points are classified as neutral. It must be noted that the use of this cutoff point is arbitrary and is not based upon a known qualitative difference in gender ideologies between those above and below this mark. This classification scheme is more amenable to the assessment and comparison of respondents scoring on opposite ends of the gender ideology scale.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the ordinary least squares regression estimates predicting two measures of paternal involvement. The first model examines the influence of mother's and father's gender ideologies on the breadth of paternal involvement. Consistent with expectations, it is apparent that egalitarian fathers demonstrate greater involvement than

traditional fathers. Contrary to expectations, the gender ideology of the mother is not associated with the breadth of paternal involvement. The age of the father and child, and the number of children are indicative of less involvement. Father's education, mother's employment and relative income, and having at least one son are associated with greater breadth of paternal involvement.

Table 2 about here

The second model of Table 2 is less successful in predicting paternal involvement. As expected, egalitarian fathers are more involved than traditional fathers, in terms of proportional hours. However, the lack of influence of mother's gender ideology was not anticipated. Not surprisingly, the work hours of the father is negatively related to the proportional hours of father's involvement.

CONCLUSION

Recently, social science research has focused on father involvement and emphasized its importance to the family, and especially children (Aldous et al., 1998; Amato, 1998; McBride & Mills, 1993; Starrels, 1994). In addition, recent studies have examined the influence of gender ideologies on men's participation in domestic work (Greenstein, 1996; Allen & Hawkins, 1999). The results of these investigations have given rise to the question: What characteristics, with respect to gender ideology, maximize paternal involvement with children? This study sought to determine whether the influence of the fathers' gender ideology on paternal involvement is contingent on the gender ideology of the mothers.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the traditionalism of the mother was not a significant predictor of paternal involvement. Fathers married to egalitarian mothers are

not more (or less) likely to become involved with their children. Instead, the influence of gender ideology is much more direct than predicted. Fathers with less traditional attitudes about gender are more involved with their children, net of the mother's gender ideology. This is true in terms of both breadth of involvement and proportion of hours spent with children.

These findings have important implications for how we understand the division of labor, at least in terms of parenting. Although prior research reminds us that parenting is a dynamic process resulting from parents' negotiations with each other (Glass, 1998; Greenstein, 1996), it is interesting to note that the ideas mothers have about gender are inconsequential to some measures of paternal involvement. Instead, it is the ideas fathers possess about gender that influences their own level of involvement.

Mothers assume the responsibilities for the overwhelming majority of childcare tasks (Hochschild, 1989; Greenstein, 1996; Milkie & Peltola, 1999), despite trends that indicate rising nontraditional behavior, including increased labor force participation by married mothers. In consideration that it is the father's ideology, not the mother's, that influences paternal involvement, perhaps these trends are not surprising. Only one third of this study's sample is classified as egalitarian. Perhaps these results affirm the notion that cultural expectations are far too engrained in society to expect more equitable arrangements in childcare or family work to emerge (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). Future research will need to assess potentially shifting gender ideologies with more recent cohorts of parents.

This study consists of several limitations. First, the measures of paternal involvement are restricted to the fathers' activities with children older than the age of 5

years. Thus, the results of this study may not be generalized to fathers without children older than five years. To compliment this work, future research must address whether similar dynamics exist with regard to paternal involvement with preschool aged children. Second, the measure of gender ideology is somewhat narrow. Whereas this study used measures that were sufficient to carry out its primary objectives, future research could be improved by utilizing a more complete measure of gender ideology. Ideally, it would be beneficial to calculate a gender ideology score that does not limit itself to items concentrating on parental work roles. Third, the final sample consists of a subset of the original sample that was continuously married between the first and second wave of the National Survey of Families and Households. By limiting the sample to those that remained married between interview waves, the results may only be generalized to intact families.

It is important to note that the analyses of this study do not extend beyond measures of the breadth of involvement, or proportional hours of paternal involvement. Thus, the results presented here do not indicate the impact of the various levels of paternal involvement evidenced by the fathers in this sample. Future research focusing on the relationship between levels of parental involvement and gender ideology should be expanded to include alternative measure of parenting behavior as well as its impact on the quality of parent-child relationships.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Analyses

Variable	M	S.D.
Paternal Involvement		
Proportional Hours	0.43	0.20
Breadth	3.91	0.97
Gender Ideology		
Father		
Egalitarian	30.2%	
Neutral	36.6%	
Traditional	33.3%	
Mother		
Egalitarian	31.2%	
Neutral	41.2%	
Traditional	31.9%	
Father's Age	39.59	5.92
Father's Education (in years)	13.76	2.78
Father's Race		
White	84.6%	
Non-White	15.4%	
Work Hours		
Father	43.62	15.28
Mother	24.52	19.00
Mother Employed		
Yes	70.5%	
No	29.5%	
Family Income (\$1000s)		
Couple income ^a	39.99	38.09
Mother's relative income	0.23	0.22
Sons		
Have son(s)	79.1%	
No son(s)	20.1%	
Age of youngest child	8.01	
Number of children		
1 child	21.2%	
2 children	47.2%	
3+ children	31.6%	

Note: $n = 1088$

^aThe inclusion of this measure does not add to the fit of the model beyond the account of relative income, and is omitted.

Table 2: OLS Regressions Predicting Measures of Paternal Involvement

	Breadth of Involvement	Proportional Hours
Age of father	-.02***	-.01
Father's race (non-White)	-.06	-1.55
Father's education	.06***	-.13
Father's work hours	-.004*	-.08
Mother's work hours	-.00	.13*
Mother employed (not employed)	.27*	-1.45
Mother's relative income	.09	-.44
Have son(s) (no son)	.19**	2.22
Age of youngest child	-.06***	.35
Number of children		
1 child	-.04	.83
(2 children)		
3+ children	-.32***	.12
Egalitarian father	.21*	6.11**
Neutral father (Traditional father)	.05	1.68
Egalitarian mother	-.02	.31
Neutral mother (Traditional mother)	.14	1.91
Intercept	4.34	40.67
R ²	.17	.05

Note: $n = 1088$. Reference categories are denoted in parentheses.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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