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Roeters, A.; Lippe, T. van der; Kluwer, E.

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ANNE ROETERS AND TANJA VAN DER LIPPE *Utrecht University*ESTHER S. KLUWER *Utrecht University**

Parental Work Demands and the Frequency of Child-Related Routine and Interactive Activities

This study examined whether the frequency of child-related activities was associated with parents' own work demands and those of their partners. In addition to parental paid working hours, we considered the parents' organizational culture and experienced job insecurity. Moreover, we differentiated between child-related routine and interactive activities. Using self-collected data on 639 Dutch couples with children, we found that paid working hours were consistently associated with a lower frequency of child-related activities. Fathers generally responded more strongly to their own and their partner's work demands than mothers. For fathers, both their own and their partner's work demands were more strongly associated with routine than with interactive activities. Mothers did not differentiate between these activities, however.

Over the past decades, the number of dual-earner families has increased dramatically in Western societies (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006), and the feeling of being under time pressure has become widespread (Hochschild, 1997;

Roxburgh, 2006). There is a general concern in society that this has detrimental consequences for the time that parents spend with their children (Bianchi, 2000). Although child development research has shown that parental involvement does indeed increase children's well-being (e.g., Bogenschneider, 1997; Yabiku, Axinn, & Thornton, 1999), work-family research focusing on the influence of parental work demands on the time spent with children generally found that the effects are small and inconsistent (e.g., Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998; Bianchi; Bianchi et al.; Brayfield, 1995; Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001; McBride & Mills, 1993; Nock & Kingston, 1988; Peterson & Gerson, 1992; Robinson & Godbey, 1999; Zick & Bryant, 1996). Moreover, international research has shown that the time parents spend with their children has increased in recent decades, even though mothers are entering the workforce in growing numbers and working life has become more demanding (Gauthier, Smeeding, & Furstenberg, 2004).

It is often suggested that paid employment has only a minor impact on the time parents spend with children because parents, and especially mothers, are very protective of this time (Bianchi, 2000; Nock & Kingston, 1988). In this article, we reexamine this assumption and analyze how parental involvement in child-related activities is associated with parents' own work demands as well as with those of their partners. We argue that it may be premature to

Utrecht University, Department of Sociology, P.O. Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands
(a.roeters@uu.nl).

*Utrecht University, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, P.O. Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands.

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claim that parental work demands do not affect this aspect of family life, for two reasons.

First, previous research may have underestimated the effects of parental employment on certain *types* of child-related activities. Most studies have considered the total time parents spend with their children and may have therefore underestimated the impact of work demands on one particular type of activity while overestimating the impact on another. Robinson and Godbey (1999) and Bianchi et al. (2006) distinguish between two fundamentally different child-related activities: routine activities, involving daily care (such as feeding or dressing a child), and interactive activities, involving the active supervision and education of children (such as reading to a child or playing together). Routine activities are less intensive, more obligatory in nature, in the sense that they cannot easily be postponed or curtailed, and have a lower intrinsic value than interactive activities. Although previous research has differentiated between these activities in the analysis of time-use trends (Bianchi et al.; Gauthier et al., 2004; Robinson & Godbey), there are no studies investigating whether paid work affects the two activities differently. It is likely, however, that parental work demands intrude less on routine activities than on interactive ones, because the latter are more flexible and can be postponed more easily. Diapers have to be changed, but parents can choose whether to place their child in front of the television or actively engage in play with them.

Second, previous research has focused mainly on paid working hours (e.g., Bianchi, 2000; Nock & Kingston, 1988). Qualitative aspects of a parent's job, such as an unsupportive work environment or a large degree of job insecurity, may function as additional work demands, however, because they too absorb time and energy and make the working role "greedy" (e.g., Coser, 1974; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Valcour & Batt, 2003; Van der Lippe, 2007). Employees who work for organizations that are less family responsive experience more work-family conflict (Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al.), and job insecurity has been found to increase stress and decrease general well-being, family satisfaction, and functioning (Larson, Wilson, & Beley, 1994; Mauno & Kinunen, 1999; Menaghan, 1991). Because few studies have examined the effects of these qualitative aspects on the actual time spent with

children (with the exception of Estes, 2004), the current study takes these psychosocial job characteristics into account.

An additional contribution of this study is that we take both fathers and mothers into account. Previous research on the influence of paid work on parental time with children tended to focus on the harmful effects of maternal employment, largely overlooking how paternal employment affects the family. The studies that did consider the father's involvement focused mainly on how fathers are affected by their partner's paid employment (e.g., Brayfield, 1995; Coverman, 1985; Presser, 1994) and not on the influence of their own work demands or the effects of their work demands on the mother's involvement. Because fathers have increased their involvement in child care in recent decades (Bianchi et al., 2006), fathers should be taken into account when examining the relationship between paid work and time with children (Townsend, 2002). Men and women differ in their commitment to work and the family, however (Bielby, 1992), and they respond differently to the demands of paid employment as a result (e.g., Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 1999; Menaghan & Parcel, 1990; Nock & Kingston, 1988). We therefore explore whether fathers and mothers differ with regard to the effects of work demands on parent-child time.

We acknowledge that the relationship between work and family life is bidirectional; family life also affects how people behave and feel at work (e.g., Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). In the present study, however, we focus on the impact of paid work on the family.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The negative influence of paid employment on parents' involvement in child-related activities is often explained on the basis of time-based conflict or the scarcity of time (e.g., Bianchi, 2000; Eby et al., 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This *time availability approach* argues that being in paid employment and working longer hours both reduce the time available for one's family. Paid work absorbs energy as well as time (G. S. Becker, 1991; Eby et al.; Greenhaus & Beutell), yielding an additional effect on parental involvement. Modern "greedy workplaces" intrude most on employees' family lives

because they demand a high level of commitment, long hours, and “face time” (P. E. Becker & Moen, 1999; Bielby, 1992; Coser, 1974). The *demand/response capacity approach* is an extension of the time availability approach (Brayfield, 1995; Coverman, 1985). It takes both partners into account and argues that involvement in household and child-care tasks depends on two factors: the demand made on an individual and the extent to which he or she can respond to this demand. It is argued that having an employed partner and young children increases one’s family demands, whereas work demands restrict one’s own response capacity. This approach implicitly assumes that parents substitute for one another in their time with children.

The demand/response capacity approach is largely confirmed by the literature. Men contribute more to housework and child care when their wives are in paid employment and work longer hours (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Coverman; Nock & Kingston, 1988; Peterson & Gerson, 1992). Brayfield even found that the spouse’s paid working hours had a greater impact on the father’s involvement than his own. As was the case in the time availability studies, however, the effects found were very small (e.g., Coverman; Hawkins & Olson, 1993; Nock & Kingston), and some studies found no effects at all (Marsiglio, 1991; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). Moreover, the few studies that have examined the effects of partner characteristics on mothers yielded mixed results. Nock and Kingston found that the father’s paid working hours had a minor positive effect on mothers’ involvement, whereas Peterson and Gerson found no effect.

The demand/response capacity approach is the starting point of our theoretical framework. Whereas the time availability approach only focuses on the individual, the demand/response capacity approach focuses on the couple. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model. In the following two sections we will elaborate on this model.

The Influence of an Actor’s Own Work Demands

In line with both the time availability and demand/response capacity approach, our first hypothesis (H_1) states that higher work demands are associated with less involvement in both routine and interactive child-related activities. Being in paid employment and spending more

time at work prevents parents from engaging in activities with their children. This hypothesis is depicted by the arrows labeled *a* through *d* that relate the parents’ own work demands to their own participation in parent-child activities. We further anticipate that workplace characteristics have an additional effect on parental involvement. We examine two workplace characteristics that are often considered in the literature on the family responsiveness of organizations (e.g., Presser, 1986; Thompson et al., 1999; Valcour & Batt, 2003). First, we expect that a restrictive *organizational culture* that does not support the family demands of employees will curtail parental involvement. This could, for example, be the case in an organization in which regular overtime is considered an indicator of organizational commitment. Parents who work for such organizations will be encouraged to devote more time and energy to work (Thompson et al.), and this is likely to restrict the amount of time and energy they have available for their children. Second, *job insecurity* may encourage people to invest more time and energy in order to safeguard their job and career, which is likely to detract time and energy from the family (Van der Lippe, 2007). We test the direct effects of these job characteristics but acknowledge that they may also have an indirect effect through parental paid working hours.

In our second hypothesis (H_2), we distinguish between routine and interactive activities. Because routine activities are more urgent and obligatory in nature than interactive activities, we expect parental work to affect routine activities to a lesser extent. Interactive activities are easier to reschedule from day to day and we therefore expect that parental work demands are more likely to curtail these activities. We thus predict that the negative effect of work demands on parental involvement in child-related activities is weaker for routine activities than for interactive activities. In terms of the conceptual model, this implies that we expect the relationships represented by arrows *a* and *c* to be weaker than the relationships represented by arrows *b* and *d*.

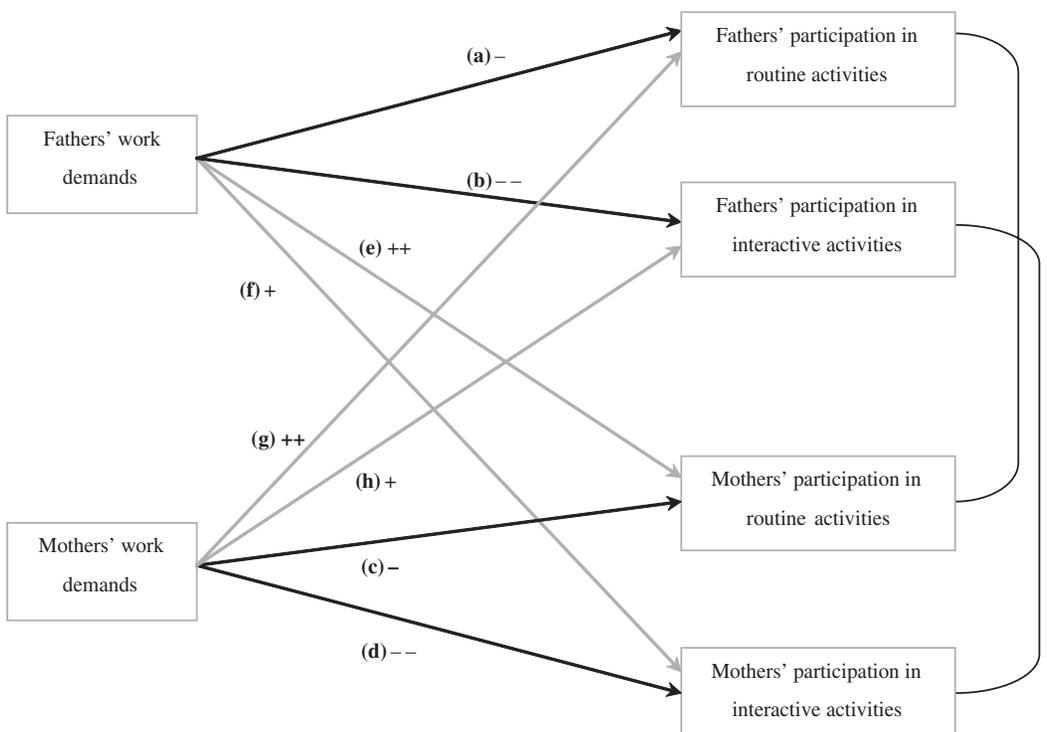
The Influence of the Partner’s Work Demands

So far, we considered parents in isolation and not as a part of a couple. Although this is in line with time availability studies, the demand/response

capacity approach predicts that fathers and mothers also respond to the work demands of their partner. We argue that if one partner is unable to engage in activities with the children as a result of high work demands, the other partner will compensate by increasing his or her own involvement. The third hypothesis (H₃) therefore states that one partner's work demands are positively associated with the other partner's involvement in child-related activities (arrows *e* through *h* in Figure 1). Although previous research has focused mainly on the effects of the partner's employment status and paid working hours, we again expect that the partner's workplace characteristics have an additional effect. We presume that if a mother is limited in her parental involvement because she works for an organization with an unsupportive organizational culture and experiences a high level of job insecurity, the father will be motivated to increase his own involvement in child-related activities and vice versa.

We extend the demand/response capacity approach by arguing that the effect of the partner's work demands may differ for the two types of child-related activities. We expect that partners are more likely to substitute for each other in routine activities than in interactive ones. Routine activities cannot easily be postponed and parents may therefore be forced to do more when their partner's job imposes more constraints. Interactive activities are less obligatory in nature. For example, when a mother's work demands limit her own child-related activities, her partner will be obliged to spend more time feeding and bathing the children, whereas he may not feel responsible for playing with them more often than he normally does. Another reason to expect the substitution effect to be weaker for interactive activities is that the frequency of such activities may be associated with the family's lifestyle. Although previous research generally classified child-related activities as unpaid labor (Gershuny,

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL.



Note: The black arrows refer to the associations between an individual's participation in child-related activities and this individual's own work demands. The gray arrows refer to the associations between an individual's participation in child-related activities and his or her partner's work demands.

2000; Gronau, 1977), interactive activities have a strong leisure component. Moreover, mothers who are more involved with their children are likely to have an involved partner as well (Harris & Morgan, 1991). Consequently, the fourth and final hypothesis states that the positive association between one partner's work demands and the other partner's parental involvement is stronger for routine activities than for interactive activities (H_4). In terms of the conceptual model, the associations represented by arrows *e* and *g* are expected to be stronger than the associations represented by arrows *f* and *h*.

The Role of Gender

Our model distinguishes between fathers and mothers. Bielby (1992) argued that because of men's strong commitment to work, society permits them to let their job interfere with family life, whereas women in paid employment generally feel a stronger commitment to the family domain than to the work domain. Women therefore go to greater lengths — and are expected to go to greater lengths — to prevent their job from interfering with their family responsibilities than men. This is especially apparent in the Netherlands, where a large proportion of Dutch mothers is in part-time employment (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2006). Although some studies found that the effects of paid work on individual well-being and family interactions are similar for men and women (Barnett, Marshall, Raudenbush, & Brennan, 1993; Galambos, Sears, Almeida, & Kolaric, 1995; Hughes, Galinsky, & Morris, 1992), others indeed found that fathers' work demands have a greater impact on family life than mothers' (Bumpus et al., 1999, p. 473; Menaghan & Parcel, 1990; Nock & Kingston, 1988). Because previous research is inconclusive on this issue, we decided to explore whether fathers and mothers differ with regard to the association between work demands and parental involvement.

We control for standard family background characteristics: the age of the youngest child, the number of children in the household, and the educational level of the parents. The family demands are higher for parents with more and younger children (Coverman, 1985), and higher educated parents have been found to invest more in their children's development (e.g., Gauthier et al., 2004).

METHOD

Data, Sample, and Response

The data used to test our hypotheses were collected by means of a computer-based survey held among a sample of Dutch households in the spring of 2007. The respondents were selected from the Taylor Nelson Sofres-Netherlands Institute for Public Opinion (TNS-NIPO) Household Panel, a large-scale household panel in the Netherlands that comprises 200,000 households. The information available on the panel members allowed us to approach those households relevant to our study. The sample is representative for the Dutch population in terms of earner types, educational level, and region. Ethnic minorities were underrepresented, which is common in Dutch survey research (Stoop, 2005). Moreover, it is likely that respondents facing extremely high work and family demands did not take part in the panel precisely because of these demands. Because information is available on all households in the panel, we could compare the respondents and nonrespondents. The respondents did not differ from the nonrespondents in terms of gender, age, life stage, household size, educational level, or employment status.

For this specific study, we selected households with two heterosexual parents and with at least one child of age 11 or younger. In general, Dutch children make the transition from primary to secondary education at the age of 12, a transition that is usually accompanied by greater physical independence for the child and less direct supervision by the parents. We selected both single-earner and dual-earner families because the percentage of single-earner families in the Netherlands is still fairly large (SCP, 2006) and because we are interested in how nonemployed parents are affected by their partner's work demands. The single-earner families constituted 9.4% of the households in the sample and the dual-earner families were broken down into households with a full-time/full-time arrangement (6.9% of the final sample), a full-time/part-time arrangement (63.7%), and a part-time/part-time arrangement (16.6%). Because a large majority of Dutch women have a part-time job, this distribution is not surprising. Although a large proportion of Dutch women is in paid employment, they work relatively few hours. This is the result of a strong belief that full-time jobs for mothers are harmful for family life that is combined with strong corporate and public

family policies (e.g., people have the right to reduce their paid working hours; SCP, 2006). On average, the age of the youngest child was 4.79 years and the couples had 1.95 children. The average number of years of education for the couples in the sample was 12.68 (on a scale ranging from 6 to 20 years of education).

Of the 1,190 two-parent households that were approached, 893 (75%) returned at least one questionnaire. We narrowed this sample down to our final sample by selecting those households in which *both* partners returned the questionnaire. This was the case for 639 households. We performed an additional analysis to check whether excluding households in which only one parent responded resulted in a selective sample. The analysis showed that this was not the case with regard to age, life stage, household size, educational level, ethnicity, and employment status.

Measures

Dependent variables. Similar to Bianchi et al.'s (2006) "estimated daily activities with children" measure, we asked the respondents to rate how often they engaged in 18 child-related activities, such as having dinner together and watching television together, in the week preceding the survey. This method produces less socially desirable answers than asking respondents to estimate how many hours per week they usually spend on activities with their children.

The activities rated as routine were having breakfast, lunch, or dinner together; caring for babies, toddlers, and young children; medical routine; and picking children up or dropping them off. This selection closely resembles the activities that Bianchi et al. (2006) labeled as routine. To this we added "having meals together." In the Netherlands, having meals with the nuclear family is common and generally considered to be part of the daily family routine. This is, for example, reflected in the fact that elementary schools give children 1 hr off during lunch time to enable them to have lunch at home. The remaining activities were labeled as interactive and cover indoor activities (e.g., playing with baby, reading to a child, watching television together), outdoor activities (e.g., walking and biking, going to the playground), educational activities (e.g., talking), and performing household tasks together (e.g., household chores, shopping). Again, the labels correspond with those of

Bianchi et al. The response categories ranged from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*more than three times per day*). We constructed the measures for routine and interactive activities by taking the mean score on the different types.

Explanatory variables. Our model included four indicators for the work demands: (a) employment status (1 = *employed*, 0 = *nonemployed*), (b) paid working hours, (c) the restrictiveness of the organization's work-family culture, and (d) job insecurity. We took employment status into account because employed and nonemployed parents may differ in how they use their time and in their commitment to child-related activities (Nock & Kingston, 1988). *Paid working hours* (including overtime) were measured by asking the respondents how many hours they did paid work in the week preceding the survey. The *restrictiveness of the work-family culture* was measured using a shortened version of the "family friendliness" scale developed by Thompson et al. (1999). The items are related to three dimensions: managerial support, career consequences, and time expectations. We included 4 items for each aspect, with our final measure consisting of 12 items (e.g., "In the event of a conflict, managers do not understand when employees have to put their family first"), each ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). The α was .90 for both fathers and mothers. Taking the mean score resulted in a 5-point scale ranging from a highly family friendly culture to a highly restrictive culture. To measure *job insecurity*, we took the average score on five items (e.g., "I am worried that I will lose my job"), with answers again ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). The same scale was used in the European Quality of Life study (Crompton, Lewis, & Lyonnelle, 2007). The reliability was high, with an α of .83 for fathers and .80 for mothers.

Control variables. We controlled for the parents' educational level (the average number of years of education), the number of children, and the age of the youngest child in the household.

Method of Analysis

We estimated both actor effects (the influence of an actor's own work demands) and partner effects (the influence of the partner's work

demands; see Kenny & Cook, 1999, for a discussion of these types of effects). Because we consider multiple dependent variables and wanted to estimate the two types of effects simultaneously, we employed structural equation modeling using AMOS (Arbuckle, 2006). This method also enabled us to test cross-equation differences between the coefficients for routine and interactive activities by imposing equality constraints. By comparing the chi-squares of the models with and without the equality constraints, we were able to test whether the association between work demands and routine activities differed significantly from the association between work demands and interactive activities.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables and includes the correlations between the dependent and independent variables. As was to be expected, mothers engaged more in child-related activities than fathers. Mothers and fathers differed little in their work demands.

The structural equation model constructed on the basis of our theoretical expectations had a chi-square of 150.8 with 48 degrees of freedom. The model fit was good with a cumulative fit index (CFI) of .933 and root mean square

error of approximation (RMSEA) of .058. The correlations between the partners' involvement in child-related activities were positive (.273 for the routine activities and .366 for the interactive activities). This implies that if one partner reported the frequency of child-related activities as being high, the other partner did so as well, even when family and work demands were taken into account. The control variables did not affect the results.

The Actor Effects

Hypothesis 1 predicted that parents who experience higher work demands would report lower frequencies of child-related activities. The results, presented in Figure 2, showed that this was mainly the case for the paid working hours. Both fathers and mothers indeed participated less in routine and interactive activities when they worked longer hours. The other work demands yielded no effects, with the exception of two marginally significant associations for the fathers. Fathers working in more restrictive organizational cultures reported lower frequencies of interactive activities ($p = .063$), and fathers who experienced more job insecurity were less involved in routine activities ($p = .076$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between the Independent and Dependent Variables for Fathers and Mothers (N = 639)

	M	SD	t test ^a	Correlation With Own Routine Activities	Correlation With Own Interactive Activities
Fathers					
Frequency of routine activities	1.19	0.65	.000	1	.64***
Frequency of interactive activities	0.70	0.49	.000	.64***	1
Employment status (1 = employed)	0.97	0.16	.000	-.05	-.01
Paid working hours	38.94	11.91	.000	-.18***	-.13***
Restrictive organizational norms	3.30	0.65	.000	.07†	.07†
Insecurity	2.25	0.76	.033	-.10*	-.02
Mothers					
Frequency of routine activities	2.40	1.00		1	.62*
Frequency of interactive activities	1.20	0.65		.62*	1
Employment status (1 = employed)	0.89	0.32		-.06	-.05
Paid working hours	20.42	12.14		-.13***	-.09*
Restrictive organizational norms	3.50	0.61		-.02	-.02
Insecurity	2.31	0.76		.02	.01

Note: Descriptive statistics of work characteristics only concern employed parents.

^a p value of t test for equality of means for fathers and mothers (paired comparisons).

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Hypothesis 2 differentiated between the two types of child-related activities and predicted that work demands were more strongly associated with the frequency of interactive activities than with the frequency of routine activities. The notes in Figure 2 show which relations differ for the two types of activities. A *p* value below .05 indicates a significant deterioration of the model fit when equality constraints were imposed. None of the cross-equation differences was significant for the mothers. The two types of activities did differ for the fathers, but the differences were the opposite of those predicted: Work demands were more strongly associated with the frequency of routine activities than with the frequency of interactive activities. The effect of the fathers' paid working hours on routine activities was stronger than the effect on interactive activities, and the same was true for the impact of job insecurity. Moreover, although fathers' job status was not related to either of the activities, the relationship with routine activities was stronger. Finally, the associations with the fathers' organizational culture did not differ significantly, even though this variable yielded a

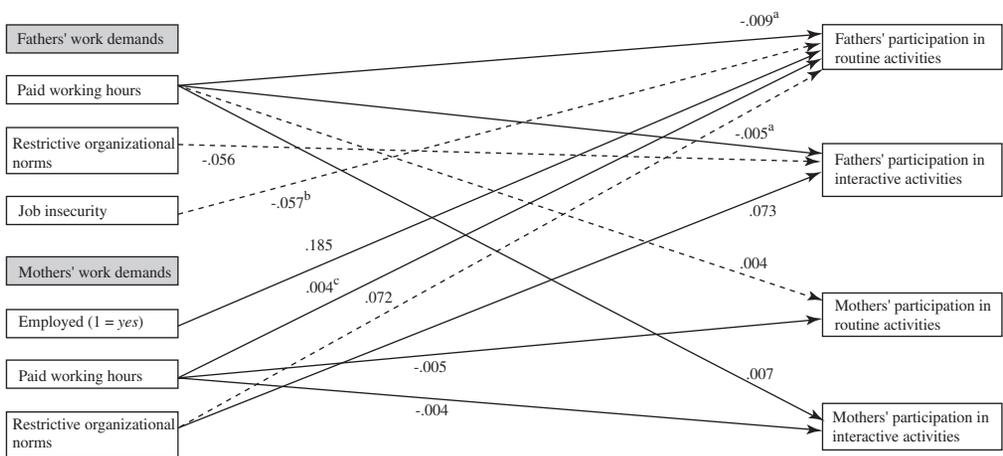
marginally significant association with the interactive activities and was not associated with routine activities.

The Partner Effects

Hypothesis 3 predicted that parents would increase their parental involvement when their partner's work demands increased. Fathers with employed partners reported higher frequencies of routine activities than their counterparts with a nonemployed partner. The frequency of fathers' routine activities increased further when their partners worked longer hours and in a more restrictive organizational culture (marginally significant). Moreover, when the organizational cultures of the mothers were more restrictive, fathers participated more in interactive activities. The mothers' child-related activities only became more frequent when their partners worked more paid hours.

The final hypothesis, Hypothesis 4, stated that the impact of the partners' work demands would be stronger on routine activities than on interactive activities. This was only partially the case, and the difference, again, only applied to the fathers. Mothers' paid working hours

FIGURE 2. PATH MODEL PREDICTING CHILD-RELATED ACTIVITIES, SIGNIFICANT ACTOR AND PARTNER EFFECTS.



Note: Unstandardized coefficients. Control variables omitted. *N* = 639. Significance at the .05 level or better. Dotted lines represent a relationship that is significant at the .10 level. ^aImposing equality constraints between the effects of fathers' paid working hours on fathers' routine activities and on father's interactive activities resulted in a significant decline of the model fit at the .01 level. ^bImposing equality constraints between the effects of fathers' job insecurity on fathers' routine activities and on father's interactive activities resulted in a significant decline of the model fit at the .00 level. ^cImposing equality constraints between the effects of mothers' paid working hours on fathers' routine activities and on father's interactive activities resulted in a significant decline of the model fit at the .00 level.

were indeed more strongly related to fathers' involvement in routine activities than to fathers' involvement in interactive activities. The same was true for mothers' employment status, although the difference was only marginally significant. The restrictiveness of the mother's organizational culture had precisely the same impact on the father's involvement in routine activities as on his involvement in interactive activities. The results revealed no difference between the father's work demands and the mother's involvement in routine and interactive activities.

We tested additional models in order to investigate whether the results differed when single earners were excluded from the analysis. Most effect sizes increased and the effects became slightly more significant. Two effects changed from marginal significance to significance on the .05 level: Fathers who reported more restrictive organizational norms were more involved in interactive activities, and the restrictive norms experienced by the mother increased the father's involvement in routine activities. We also tested an alternative model that excluded watching television together, which is likely to be the most passive interactive activity, from the analyses, but this did not change the results.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine how parental involvement in routine and interactive activities related to parents' own work demands and those of their partner. On the basis of the demand/response capacity approach, we predicted that parents would be less involved in child-related activities when their work demands—as indicated by employment status, paid working hours, the restrictiveness of the organizational culture and job insecurity—were higher. We also expected parents to increase their involvement in response to their partners' work demands. Finally, we expected routine activities (i.e., customary daily care) to be less sensitive to a parent's own work demands and more sensitive to his or her partner's demands than the more discretionary and intensive interactive activities (i.e., active supervision and play).

As predicted, parents who worked longer hours and parents whose partner worked shorter hours were less involved in activities with their children. The qualitative aspects of their

jobs—the organizational culture and job insecurity—were not or were only marginally related to parental involvement, however. Our results further suggest that fathers and mothers respond differently to their own work demands and those of their partner. The time mothers spend with their children was barely affected by their own and their partners' work demands, whereas the temporal involvement of fathers was more sensitive to both their own work demands and those of their partner. Moreover, fathers differentiated more than mothers between routine and interactive activities with children, with participation in routine activities being more reactive to work demands. This suggests that paternal participation in routine activities is flexible and discretionary, whereas interactive activities are relatively fixed.

The findings are partly consistent with our conceptual model. Although the theoretical idea behind the demand/response capacity approach is quite simple—time and energy are scarce resources that are divided between the work and family domains—reality is not. Higher work demands do not automatically imply spending less time with one's children. Work characteristics other than paid working hours had little explanatory value and the effects that did occur were small. Nevertheless, these findings are consistent with previous empirical research (e.g., Bianchi, 2000). Apparently, parents find ways to minimize the extent to which work encroaches on family life (P. E. Becker & Moen, 1999). Our study shows that mothers in particular experience low flexibility with regard to parent-child time. As a result, work demands may be met at the expense of other activities, such as individual or couple leisure time without children (Bianchi et al., 2006; Bittman & Wacjman, 2000). Future research could look into the wider implications of this. We also expected parents to prioritize child-related routine activities over interactive activities. We indeed found a difference between routine and interactive activities, but only for the fathers, and in the opposite direction: Fathers' routine activities appear to be more, rather than less, flexible. This difference is in line with earlier studies that showed that fathers prefer play-related activities over care-related activities and that, as a result, they use their child-care time mainly for "fun" activities such as play and less for the basic care tasks (Bianchi et al.; Robinson & Godbey, 1999).

Combining work and family life poses challenges for parents and forces them to make decisions, men and women alike. Yet, the gender of the parent and the nature of the activities affect these decisions. The general pattern that emerges from our study suggests that fathers have more discretion than mothers with regard to child-related activities. The small effects for the mothers further confirm the general notion that they protect the time with their children because they feel a great sense of responsibility toward them (e.g., Bianchi, 2000; Bianchi et al., 2006; Hays, 1996; Nock & Kinston, 1988). This gender difference is in line with some previous studies (Bumpus et al., 1999) but not with others (e.g., Galambos et al., 1995). According to Bielby (1992, p. 289), men “allow (and are permitted to allow) work to intrude on family time” whereas this is less the case for women. In interpreting the work-family choices of men, it is important to note that for many fathers, having a job and providing financial security is part of being a good father (Bianchi et al., p. 176; Townsend, 2002). The finding that fathers respond more strongly to their own work demands and those of their partners has interesting policy implications. It suggests that policies aimed at increasing the participation of fathers in the family could focus on several aspects of fathers’ own work, as well as on the labor market participation of mothers.

The difference between routine and interactive activities sheds new light on the findings of earlier studies on paternal involvement with children. Our study suggests that the demand/response capacity approach provides a better explanation for fathers’ involvement in routine activities than for their involvement in interactive ones. This may explain why previous research has yielded inconsistent results (e.g., Brayfield, 1995; Marsiglio, 1991; Yeung et al., 2001). Most studies considered the total amount of time fathers spend caring for their children, but the definition of what activities constitute child care generally remained vague. Differences in the operationalization of paternal involvement may therefore explain the inconsistent findings. Future research could benefit from a clear conceptualization of parental time that takes differences in the nature of activities into account.

Another interesting avenue for future research would be to investigate the relationship between parental behavior, attitudes, and commitment

toward work and the family. Although previous research suggests that parental behavior is guided by feelings of commitment (Bielby, 1992), we believe that the literature would benefit from future studies measuring parental commitment and attitudes toward family activities, as this could help clarify the underlying mechanisms.

We should note that the effects that were found might partly be the result of selection effects. Parents may select a certain workplace and work schedule in order to maximize time with their children. Previous research has shown that mothers in particular are likely to adjust their work schedules to accommodate family demands (England & Farkas, 1986). Longitudinal data would help to disentangle the selection effects from the pure effects of work demands. In a similar fashion, many women scale back and take a part-time job in order to prevent paid work from impinging on family life (P. E. Becker & Moen, 1999), which may mute the employment effect (Bianchi et al., 2006, p. 86) and explain why the organizational culture and job insecurity were not or were only weakly associated with parent-child time. Although employment status has a similar impact on child-care time in the Netherlands and the United States (Van den Broek, 2006), the prevalence and frequent use of work-family policies in the Netherlands limits the generalization of our results. Cross-national comparisons could provide more insight into the ways in which institutional structures influence work-to-family effects. Such studies could also explore the classification of joint activities in greater depth. For example, although having meals together is typically a routine activity in the Netherlands, this may be different in the United States, where daily family meals are much less common. Finally, we should note that we had no information on secondary activities and other people who may have been present during child-related activities (Folbre, Yoon, Finnoff, & Fuligni, 2005; Zick & Bryant, 1996). Time-diary data could solve this problem, and analyses based on more detailed information may reveal more subtle effects of work demands.

In conclusion, our study showed that fathers and mothers respond differently to the demands of paid work and family life. Fathers experience a certain degree of flexibility with regard to their involvement in child-related activities, whereas the involvement of mothers seems relatively

fixed. The nature of family activities appears to be relevant in this respect, as the fathers' work demands intrude most on their involvement in basic care tasks, suggesting that fathers give the priority to interactive activities such as play with their children.

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