Family Time: An Analysis of Ways Parents Spend Time with their Children
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In *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau (2003) uses qualitative data to shed light on the ways in which parents pass cultural capital on to their children and how those methods differ by class. Middle-class parents engage in a process of "concerted cultivation," in which children are encouraged to participate in organized activities and reasoning skills are emphasized. In contrast, working-class and poor families facilitate the "accomplishment of natural growth." These children are largely expected to entertain themselves, and obedience to adults is demanded. Parents who subscribe to these two philosophies of child-rearing differ in both the activities they did with children (middle class children spend much more time in planned, adult-directed activities than working class children) and in the ways in which they interact with their children when they are together (middle class parents encourage more verbal interactions, while working class parents emphasize obedience). In this paper, I use data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to take a closer look at class differences the first of these aspects of parental time with children, the actual activities parents do with their children.

Studies on parental time with children have often focused on child care activities or looked at estimates of total time spent with children. This paper looks at child care time and total time with children, but its unique contribution is that it takes a more detailed look at the sorts of activities that fall in the difference between child care time and total time with children. Performing day-to-day activities in the presence of children is one way in which parents pass their cultural capital along to children. For example, while we may not often think of a trip to the grocery store as a way to instruct children, parents are in fact teaching children about food, dietary habits, menu planning, and budgeting as they make their way through the store.

This paper answers the following questions: How does the total amount of time parents spend with children vary by social class? How does the distribution of that time across different types of activities vary by social class? Do parents of different social classes vary in the likelihood that they will engage in some types of activities with their children?

I use the ATUS to answer these questions. The ATUS is a time diary study with cross-sectional waves of outgoing CPS participants from 2002 to 2006. There were 20,720 respondents in 2002 and around 13000 respondents in each of 2004-2006 for a total sample size of 60,674. The time diary for each respondent consists of all of the activities performed from 4:00 a.m. one day until 4:00 a.m. the next. For each activity, respondents are also asked whether or not they were also caring for children and, for most activities, respondents are asked who was with them while the performed the activity. I use these data to create measures of how much time parents spend with their children and how much time they spend in specific activities with their children present. Children's schedules change dramatically once they enter school, so the analysis is performed separately for children under the age of six and children ages six to twelve. A list of activity categories to be measured is included as Appendix A.

The main independent variable in this study is education, used as a proxy for social class. I also control for household income, the gender of the parent, parent's marital status, parent's age, parent's employment status, total number of household children, whether the diary day was a work day or not, and whether the diary day was a weekday or not. Each of these factors is expected to affect the amount of time the parent has available to spend with the child.

In addition to descriptive crosstabs detailing the number of minutes per day parents spend in different activities with their children present, I also present two types of regression results. Tobits are used to predict the number of minutes per day in the various categories of activities, and logistic regressions are used to predict the probability that a parent will engage in a particular type of activity.

Appendix A

Activity Categories:

Child Care (of household children)
Care for Others (household adults, non-household children)
Household Activities (includes cooking, cleaning, home repairs, yard work, care of pets, etc.)
Work-Related Activities (presence of children is not indicated for work, but could be fore activities like socializing as part of job or searching for a job)
Shopping (includes shopping for consumer goods as well as services, such as financial services, legal services, or home maintenance services)
Eating & Drinking
Media (watching TV, using the computer, reading, etc.)
Parent's Education Activities (taking a class, doing homework, etc.)
Community Activities (includes volunteering, religious activities, and government/civic obligations)
Socializing (includes socializing, attending social events, talking on the phone with friends or relatives, etc.)
Cultural Activities (attending performing arts events, visiting museums, attending sporting events, etc.)
Sports/Exercise
Other Leisure Activities (hobbies, arts and crafts, playing games)
Travel (trips to and from school, work, and other locations)