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The value of parenting: gendered time expectations among the Spanish middle class

DAFNE MUNTANYOLA-SAURA  and NÚRIA SÁNCHEZ-MIRA 

This paper analyses the gendered expectations of time of Spanish middle-class parents. The main goal is to understand how parents value their parenting time. Parents embody a specific social structuring of the everyday that is both gendered and individualist. The claim of this paper is that the value of parenting time, despite being expressed in individual terms, is shaped by gendered social expectations. The methodological strategy includes the conduction of semi-structured interviews and participatory photography. The qualitative sample is composed of 28 professional parents with children under three living in Barcelona. The results reveal gendered time expectations happen outside negotiation. They are not a strategic outcome, but the relational consequence of the structured value of time in capitalist societies.

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the gendered expectations of time among Spanish middle-class parents. Childrearing and household management remains a women's responsibility in Spain, just as elsewhere in Europe and the US (Craig 2006; Offer and Schneider 2011). Despite increased male involvement in care, task segregation persists (Carrasco and Recio 2001; Carrasco and Mayordomo 2005; Moreno 2015; Moreno-Colom, Ajenjo-Cosp, and Borràs-Català 2018). Moreover, professional or managerial jobs provide couples with a greater degree of flexibility compared to more time-rigid jobs of working-class couples (Sánchez-Mira 2016; Sánchez-Mira and Muntanyola Saura 2020). The idea that time is a resource, much like money, used or spent in relation to different practices, is the basis of the existence of time-use studies (Ajenjo and García 2014;

Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011; Moreno 2015). However, parents' personal time is experienced and expressed in strictly individual terms. Romero-Balsas (2015), Callejo (2013) and Muntanyola-Saura (2014), show how negotiation is taken as the rational behaviour for parenting scheduling.

But how do parents really value their use of time? The value of parenting time cannot be explained by the existence of a negotiation under the assumption of free choice. Our proposal opens the black box of negotiation by exploring time allocation in parenting. Gender expectations are understood as the tendency of parents to perform practices according to taken for granted temporality (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The claim of this paper is that the value of parenting time, despite being expressed in individual terms, is shaped by gendered social expectations.

Methodologically, this paper expands the existing studies on time use with micro empirical observations of the everyday. We look into the allocation of parenting time by conducting semi-structured interviews with participatory photography. This qualitative methodological strategy allows capturing moments of conflict and satisfaction that are difficult to verbalise because of their fleeting and embodied nature. Our interview sample is composed of 28 professional middle-class parents with children under three living in Barcelona and its metropolitan area. A thematic analysis of the interviews and photographs was conducted by means of Atlas.ti software.

The structure of this paper is the following. A theoretical section reviews the role of flexible schedules on gendered parenting; we present the individualist approach to parenting and develop an

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alternative relational and pragmatic framework for the social construction of gendered expectations on time. A methodological section describes the sampling strategy, the methods, and the type of analysis conducted. Our findings section is based on the analysis of the gendered structure of everyday time uses and meanings, and focuses on the good and bad moments of daily life as they appeared in the parent's accounts and participatory photography. This is followed by a discussion of the findings and the conclusions. Scheduling time for work or for care is not only a personal choice, but a social product of how parents value their gendered time.

THE DOUBLE EDGE OF FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES

Why is inequality persistent despite favourable working conditions for both partners? Part time work in Spain and in the rest of Europe is increasingly taken by female workers: 23% of female workers for 8% of male workers in Spain (CC.OO 2020). However, in 2019, 23.8% of women have part time jobs, while the EU average is 32%. In women aged 25 to 44 years old, which corresponds to the time of motherhood, the rate raises only to 25%. Still, the wage gap for part-time workers was greater than for full time workers: 16.3% over 14.3%. Moreover, temporality is much higher in Spain than in the EU: 27.2% of all waged workers had temporary contracts, while EU average is only 14.1%. Covid has increased the number of highly skilled parents working from home. Eurofound (2020) reported that workers increasingly work from home: 30.2% of workers in 2020, while before the pandemic the figures were below 10%. Distribution by gender was similar, 39% of workers from home are women and 37% are men. However, such changes in the job market have not reduced the gender gap in care and domestic work.

As shown in several studies, flexibility at work seems to be a double-edged tool, with potential negative implications for gender inequality (Lewis, Gambles, and Rapoport 2007). While in Spain housework and childcare during COVID has increased as a whole, there has been an increased segregation of tasks by gender. Survey data collected by Farré et al. (2020) show that the participation of men in domestic work increased slightly in grocery shopping, but remained the same for cleaning and doing laundry. Men increasingly went grocery shopping during complete lockdown (38% of men, when leaving the house was only allowed for grocery shopping), while 28% of women stayed at home, while before Covid the

numbers where 20% of men went grocery shopping and 38% of women stayed at home (Farré et al. 2020). At the same time, mothers spend twice as much time as fathers in tutoring school tasks (Bonaf and González 2020). Qualitative data show differences in the use of space: men chose the (private) office for work while women shared the common spaces (with children) (Borrà and Moreno, 2021).

Time is not only relevant because it is unequally distributed between men and women, but because there are notable gender differences in the experience, perception and meaning attributed to time (Sullivan 1997; Carrasco and Recio 2001; Hallberg and Klevmarken 2003; Carrasco and Mayordomo 2005; Zerubavel 1997; Muntanyola-Saura 2014; Carrasco and Dominguez 2015; Sánchez-Mira 2018). Expectations on work family balance remained strongly gendered despite flexible schedules (Tammelin et al. 2019).

THE INDIVIDUALISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON PARENTING TIME

Theories of individualisation and reflexive modernity put forward the growing weight of individual decisions and opinions in different spheres of social life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1998). Couples are assumed to need to reflect over their relationships and make active choices regarding how they want to live their lives (Bauman 2003). Under the canopy of this worldview, the aspirational projects of parents, their expectations on work and care, become an individualised paramount reality (Castells 1997).

Accordingly, parents narrate their experiences of time in individualist terms. Ramos (2007), Romero-Balsas (2015), Callejo (2013) and Muntanyola-Saura (2014) show how negotiation is taken as the rational behaviour for parenting scheduling. According to Ramos's (2007), time as a resource for action is a common metaphor in everyday language: the scarcity of it. Personal time for men and women is an individualised experience that is not that of family or work (Callejo 2013). Moreover, 'time is invested' in care or work, in a zero-sum game that reproduces the logics of the market (Callejo 2013). 'Personal time' is experienced and expressed in strictly personal terms: Shir-Wise (2018) defines the ideal of 'free time' in line with Callejo's (2013) analysis of the use of 'my time'. Myykänen and Leena Böök (2014) found that Finnish parents build discourses that emphasise 'own time' and 'own pleasure'. In Muntanyola-Saura (2014) the desire for 'finding personal space' in both Spanish and US parents' discourse is time that is not invested in others but in

one's own body or mind. Personal space is constructed in opposition to family space, particularly for Spanish fathers, but also among mothers.

Moreover, a social metonymy restricts the definition of personal time and space in individual terms of availability and accessibility (Muntanyola-Saura 2014). 'My space' constitutes a social stereotype on contemporary parenthood that gives parents autonomy in highly individualised terms. Time as a resource belongs to the habitual routine of parents. That is, the individualism of negotiation permeates the discourse of middle-class parents not only in Spain, but also in the rest of Europe and in the US (Giddens 1998; Bauman 2003).

A PRAGMATIC VIEW ON PARENTING PRACTICES

The discourse on individual time expectations constitutes narratives of normalisation. The organisational dimension of the family, that is, the social awareness that these members are part of an institution with its own norms, traditions and responsibilities, becomes secondary (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1998). Class and gender loose relevance as structuring axes of inequality, and the couple appears as a harmonious unit, foreign to conflict and alien to power relations. Hakim (2000) articulates within the individualist framework a theory of preferences. The heterogeneity of individual preferences among mothers is modulated by their lifestyle before childbirth: there are work-centred women, home-centred women and adaptive women. The empirical typology comes from the mothers' sense of agency. The term lifestyle substitutes other structuring social factors such as class or cultural capital, and preferences are taken as individual products.

Alternative views to Hakim (2000) appear when, as in Gerson (2017), parenting practices are not assumed to reflect the parents' preferences. Her collected interviews show how neotraditional parents in the US might reproduce traditional arrangements that do not correspond to their initial gender expectations. Gerson puts forward how a structural division of work and care along gender lines shapes such parenting practices, sometimes at odds with their needs and desires.

In Spain, women continue to allocate more time to household chores and family compared to men (Moreno-Colom, Ajenjo-Cosp, and Borràs-Català 2018). This happens despite an equal paid parental leave for both parents of 16 weeks paid by the Spanish government. Although male involvement in these tasks

increases, the segregation of activities persists, since females take responsibility on a daily basis. The social value of paid work is higher than caring for the children, which is defined as mothering work (Torns and Moreno 2008). Following Harvey (2017), this division responds to the structural capitalist dichotomy between the value of work and the antivalue of activities that fall outside the market, such as household chores. In other words, there is an asymmetry of task distribution: mothers remain in charge of *antivaluable* tasks. Harvey (2017) quotes Derrida and uses 'the madness of economic reason' to describe this cultural worldview that defines capitalism: Upon examination of this 'value in motion' it becomes clear that capitalist accumulation is a spiral that needs to redeem its own anti-value in a perpetual self-propelled dance grounded on fetishist beliefs and extending proletarianisation to larger social groups (208).

Moreover, in such contradiction lies a possibility for resistance and change: the alternative reality of exchange markets such as time banks, shared economy logics, crowdfunding and the like. Anti-value thereby defines an active field of anti-capitalist struggle. (...) The working class is the embodiment of anti-value (Harvey 2017, 77).

Thus, by attributing higher value to paid work than to household tasks or child care parents are displaying expectations that derive from the specific rationality of capitalism. Harvey also claims that such 'economic reason' is socially destructive: we can argue that the 'rational' expectations of parents hide the social need for the reproduction of care under the rug of highly valued commodities for work and consumption. Both Harvey (2017) and Gerson (2017) make apparent the conflictive nature of scheduling time for work and care. It is not only a matter of personal choice, but a relational product of the social construction of gendered time.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED TIME

The assumption of parental responsibilities during the first year of the child shapes the parents' roles as caregivers in Spain and elsewhere (Meil, Romero-Balsas and Rogero-García 2017, Barbeta-Viñas and Muntanyola-Saura 2020; Hass and O'Brien 2010). The social construction, in Berger and Luckmann (1966) terms, of the couple's daily timing responds to gendered expectations, which are rarely the subject of explicit discussion or negotiation. Specifically, Nyman and Erikson (2014) reveal that couples share constructions of (un)suitability, thus reporting men and women as

being more or less suitable for different tasks related to care and work. Kaźmierczak and Karasiewicz (2018) show how Polish mothers and fathers build their identity differently over the transition to parenthood. The hegemonic assumption that the mother should be the primary caregiver role during the first year of the child's life reinforces the traditional definition of gender expectations and a differential construction of parenting in terms of gender.

The data on time use in Spain as well as in Europe and the US make clear the inequality of time allocation by gender (Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011; Moreno 2015). The lack of control over time acknowledges mothers, and particularly mothers of young children, as chronically 'time poor', due to the time required to provide basic care of an infant and the household, in addition to the pressures to undertake other tasks associated with being a 'good mother' (Gunthorpe & Lyons in von Benzon 2020). Bartlett (2010) problematises the experiences of new mothers that must adapt to established temporalities, such as that of breastfeeding, described as taking place in a *baby daze*. Wada, Backman, and Forwell (2015) show that Canadian fathers in egalitarian dual earning couples go through two ideological tensions: one in terms of their role as a male breadwinner as opposed taking care of their children, the other in their conflicting need for relaxing, rest or entertainment away from family time. As Carrigan and Duberley (2013, 111) put forward, decisions about where to put time resources are both emotional and moral.

Mothers tend to conflate family time with personal time. Tornø and Moreno (2008) show how the sexual division of time marks a strong difference in availability and accessibility of personal time: Mothers coordinate and synchronise the weekday schedule of the family, while fathers are those in charge of free time and weekends. Fathers spend more time on interactive care and more time alone with children on weekends than on weekdays. Mothers are more in charge of daily tasks, such as fixing dinner and putting the children to sleep. Zerubavel (1997) claims that fathers save time for their own needs, a time that cannot be accessed by their children, while mothers are always available. Men have more control than women over *when* to make their contributions to child care and housework (Hochschild and Machung 2003). Therefore, emotional labour remains clearly gendered.

The parents' use and perception of time are socially constructed and linked to differential female and male gender attributes. According to Zerubavel (1997) and

Zuccheromaglio and Talamo (2000) time is constructed interactionally, following social expectations. In socio-phenomenological terms, such temporality has the weight of facticity, it is a taken for granted feature of the everyday of family life (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Differences between mothers and fathers correspond to a gendered morality of social order (Garfinkel 1967). This social order derives from the specific rationality of capitalism (Harvey 2017). The organisation of the everyday is necessarily a social issue, defined by the value scale of capitalism, and not strategic calculation. This is a departure from the functionalist picture of a family environment made of verbal negotiations. In a kernel, parents embody a specific social structuring of the everyday that is both individualist and gendered.

METHODS

This paper follows a qualitative approach, since our main goal is to capture the intersubjective construction of parenting discourse and practices. Research methods used are semi-structured interviews, administered separately to both members of the couple, and *participatory photography*. The sample was composed of 28 heterosexual mothers and fathers of children under three years of age, living in Barcelona and its Metropolitan area in 2017, in pre-covid times (Appendix 1). Families in our study represent an urban and employed population representative of a middle-class background, with a high educational level and with middle class professional categories, living in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (see Table II). Barcelona is the capital of the region of Catalonia, with the lowest fertility rate in Europe, 1.3 births per woman and the oldest maternity age, 31 years old for first-time mothers (Eurostat 2020). Women's employment rate in Spain is 61% while men's is 73%, well below the EU average rate (67% for women and 78% for men). However, our specific subset of professional middle-class parents shows higher rates of employment for both genders, a situation that reflects upon the employment status of our sample (see Table II). In terms of flexibility, full time is the preferred option for most Spanish workers for both genders. In terms of childcare, around 42% of children under 3 attend public or private childcare centres, well below Norway and France, with 58%, but well over Finland or Germany, with rates around 30% (Roger-García et al. 2021).

This study has certain limitations because of small and socially homogeneous sample. The specificity of the sample and the methodology used do not allow us to present these findings as representative of broader trends in the population. However, the decision to

restrict heterogeneity of the sample in terms of social class was taken to be able to focus in a social group which is homogeneous in terms of resources and ability to externalise care, together with shared parenting style, as shown by Sánchez-Mira and Muntanyola Saura (2020). We contacted couples using a snowball technique with multiple entries. The authors' personal networks were first mobilised, and we then asked the participants to provide further contacts at the end of their interviews. Interviews were conducted by both authors, they lasted between 1 and 2 hours, and were conducted separately for each partner. The same researcher interviewed both partners at separate dates or times.

Interviews included a set of questions on daily routines and how those routines were affected by the transition to parenthood. We asked about expectations and ideals on parenting prior to childbirth and to what extent these were met by the interviewees' actual experiences as parents. We asked about the care arrangements that parents set in place in terms of childcare services, other family members and nannies. We avoided asking directly about the conception of time, but we asked about their personal space and introduced the participatory photo technique to tackle good and bad moments of everyday life.

We applied participatory photography, a modified version of photo-elicitation (Harper 2002). There are other experiences of participatory photography, especially by non-governmental organisations that work with international integration and development projects such as Photovoice (Wang and Burris 1997). More specifically, we follow the proposal of the team of Finnish sociologists Myykänen and Leena Böök (2014), whose study included pictures of everyday family life. We asked parents to provide us with pictures taken with their phones. We specifically asked couples to take pictures of those situations in their family life that cause them wellbeing and satisfaction, and also those of discomfort and frustration. Parents sent those through WhatsApp and they were commented informally in post interview exchanges online and offline. This verbal feedback was paramount for understanding the context where the pictures were taken and thus avoiding the taken for granted of everyday actions involved in child care. As in Muntanyola-Saura (2012:94), the literality of the visual image increases the attention to detail: it intensifies our cognitive capacity and increases narrative articulation. Pictures allow to capture episodes

of life difficult to verbalise and of a fleeting or intermittent nature, difficult to remember in a post-hoc interview.

A qualitative, thematic analysis of the interviews (Braun and Clarke 2006) was performed with Atlas.ti software (version 8.2.4). Several rounds of coding were conducted, and researchers met at each stage to discuss the emerging categories and codes and their application to the coding of the interviews. The process of hierarchical coding was the result of an abductive process of dialogue between the flexible theoretically derived concepts from the theoretical framework and the inductive input from the data. Interviews were first coded and analysed vertically: each interview with the collected pictures was analysed as an entity. We then conducted cross-sectional analyses to compare the experience of each interviewee with their partner. And cross-sectional analyses were performed to find patterns across the couples. Interviews were conducted in either Catalan or Spanish. The excerpts quoted in the findings section have been translated into English.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the analysis of the parent's accounts and pictures about the good and bad moments of their everyday life, revealing the socially constructed nature of work-life articulation. Table 11 collects information on the age, profession, employment status, number and age of children at the time of the interview. Parents are mostly white collar and freelance professionals, with middle to high cultural capital. Moreover, while some interviewees, like Alan who works in academia or Violet who is an architect, have the possibility of working from home, most do not (interviews were conducted before the covid pandemic). As for their employment status, they do not follow the normal distribution in Spanish job market for this professional sector: while most of them are employed, mothers tend to work part time, mostly by a reduction of working hours, and fathers remain working full time. Such widespread use of working hours reductions can be explained by the attachment parenting style of these professional mothers (see Sánchez-Mira and Muntanyola Saura 2020 for a development on this phenomenon). Exceptions to the gendered norm, such as Zacharias that works periodically from home, or Seth that works part time as a teacher, constitute variations of the hegemonic patterns as we will see in the findings

just below. We divided our findings in three subsections: *Personal time expectations*, *Good and bad times*, and the *value of paid work*.

Personal Time Expectations

Complains about the tiredness and time strains appear both in male and female accounts. The lack of time to rest is a source of unease for both genders.

This tiredness, you didn't expect. Being in such critical situations ... At night, one is ill, the other crying, and the day after it's a mess at work. You have an important meeting; you are tired ... you are on edge. (Peter, 36, investments and corporate development, employed full-time).
I have never slept again ... Never, never, never ... [...] This, they tell you, and you know, but you can't imagine ... Now I fall asleep, no matter what happens and ... this is very hard, it's really hard. (Sylvia, 37, lawyer, employed part-time).

Still, the interviewed fathers seem to have more trouble enduring the lack of personal time and space, or at least this appears more centrally in their accounts. We observe that the lack of personal space for mothers may result from their emotional attachment to the children, making it harder to spend time apart from them:

Peter does sports. He gets up very early and goes cycling, or running, or whatever ... But it's harder for me. [...] I know that I have to find time for myself, everybody tells me ... [...] Peter needs to go running and I'd rather be with the children. (Karen, 34, chief of marketing department, employed part-time).

Moreover, mothers seem to hold a stoical attitude, the loss of personal space is taken for granted.

I gave up yoga, I used to do yoga. But it was at 9 in the evening and I would fall asleep ... and it also happened that I would go there, and she (her daughter) wouldn't fall asleep. (Sylvia, 37, lawyer, employed part-time).

They seem to claim more quality time with their children as personal time, and this marks a dichotomy between the workdays and the weekend:

During the week, the working days, the best moment is when I put Laura [daughter] to sleep and then we spend some time in the couch. And on the weekend when we wake up, it's different ... During the week it's juggling all the time [...] On the weekends, instead, you

can get up slowly [...]. Waking up, playing, preparing breakfast ... It's different. (Sylvia, 37, lawyer, employed part-time).

Fathers keep a specific segment of time for them. Indeed, when asked about good moments in their everyday life, men often mention moments of time for themselves, a personal space:

My best moment? Sometimes I have to get up at 6 and get work done ... These 10 minutes when I open my computer, with coffee ... that's very good. Or the days I must bring Frank [son] to school, this moment of peace, from 8:30 to 8:35 ... [...] Having 5 minutes ... (Peter, 36, investors and corporate development, employed full-time).

It's a complicated triangle where the personal part is also impossible, so I have very good moments at work or at home when I have time for me ... [...]. I love the accordion [...] These moments that I can play ... Wow, I really treasure it. (Zacharia, 39, computer consultant, employed full-time).

Moreover, Seth's following excerpt shows how the two kinds of good moments of everyday life, spent playing with the kids or having some time of one's own, correspond for many fathers to a clear cut between family time and individual time.

There is a fantastic moment in the day, which is ... [Sighs] 'I finished everything, they [the kids] are sleeping, peace and quiet ...' We can watch TV, listen to the radio, whatever ... This feeling I even have when doing [the dishes] [laughs], 'Okay, I need my moment of parenthesis, of not being with children all the time'. But there are also the nice moments: Here [the living room], the four of us dancing. There is no price for it. It's two worlds I move in, you know? The individual [world] and the family one. (Seth, 32, secondary education teacher, employed part-time).

Such a division tends to appear more clearly in fathers' accounts than in those of mothers, revealing the gendered morality of social order. Still, we also collected some quotes of mothers complaining about the social expectations imposed on mothers by their partners in terms of time availability for the child.

Grabbing a drink with a friend, or going to yoga, I must always look for an alternative, while he [the father] can improvise because the assumption is that I can take care of the child. (Mara, 37, Art manager, Reduction).

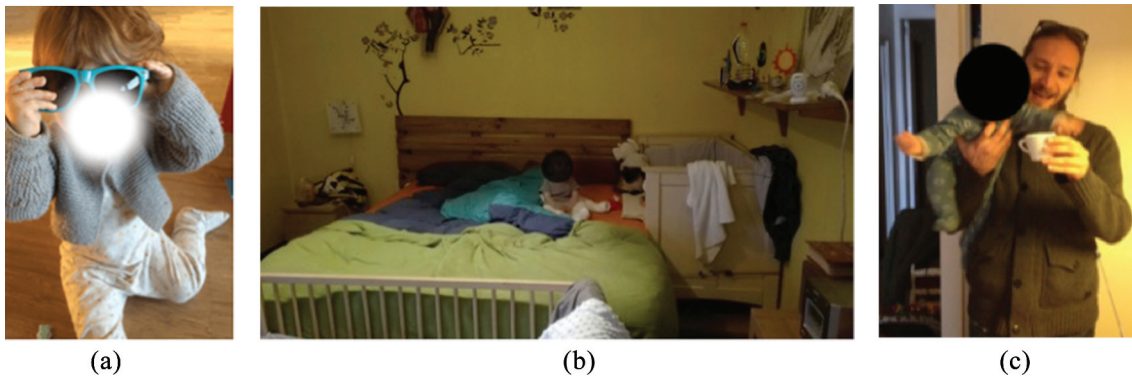


FIGURE 1. Pictures of good moments by Christopher (left), Mara (centre) and Roman (right).

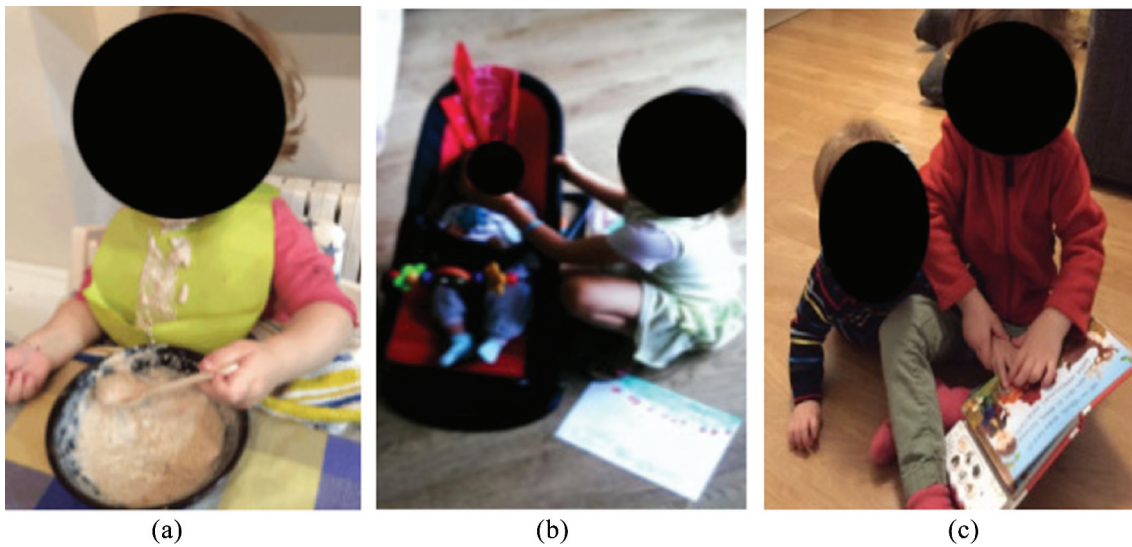


FIGURE 2. Pictures of good moments of children autonomy.

Good Times and Bad Times

Play and lie

The title of this subsection captures the duality of valuable family time, which is identified by both parents when playing with the child on the one hand, and resting, on the other. Good moments captured by our informants' pictures are associated to child play. Cristopher frames a closeup of her toddler while she is goofing around (Figure 1, left). Mara describes waking up with her child, with whom she shares the bed, as follows: *When we wake up in the morning, we stretch and snuggle and laugh* (Figure 1, centre). Roman provides in his interview another example of child play that he will later capture with his partner's phone (Figure 1, right). Notice that he is talking of the time when he comes home from work for a coffee break,

since his work schedule allows him to spend this pleasurable and playful time with his child.

A good moment with Elias is the coffee break. Half of my workday is through, I leave the office, it's sunny, I see them at home, it's the first moment he really is awake and sees me, we goof around, I talk to Celia about how the morning went, what will they do later. (Roman, 37, industrial designer, employed full time).

Mothers were the only ones who sent pictures of the child acting autonomously or in shared play among siblings (Figure 2). For instance, on the left, June shows us her daughter eating by herself. In the centre, the older sister feeds the youngest boy, while the mother is



FIGURE 3. Pictures of good moments of children sleeping.

bathing the other sister. On the right, Karen sent us a picture of the older sister ‘reading’ a book to her younger brother, giving the mother some time off.

Moreover, mothers were also the only ones that identified as good moments pictures that show the baby sleeping or distracted. Celia provided the two following pictures in Figure 3, described as a ‘Relaxed moment’ (left), where the baby is watching the fish tank and ‘Relaxed, napping on top of me’ (right). These slices of everyday life with

their children being autonomous, sleeping or distracted point towards the mothers’ struggle with the availability and accessibility of personal time (Zerubavel 1997; Torns and Moreno 2008).

The gender difference in the kind of pictures of good moments indicates the persistence of a moral order whereby women’s uses of time is entrenched with caring duties. Nonetheless, we also observe that women appreciate some alone time, when they can have some quiet time for themselves, as shown by the quotes by

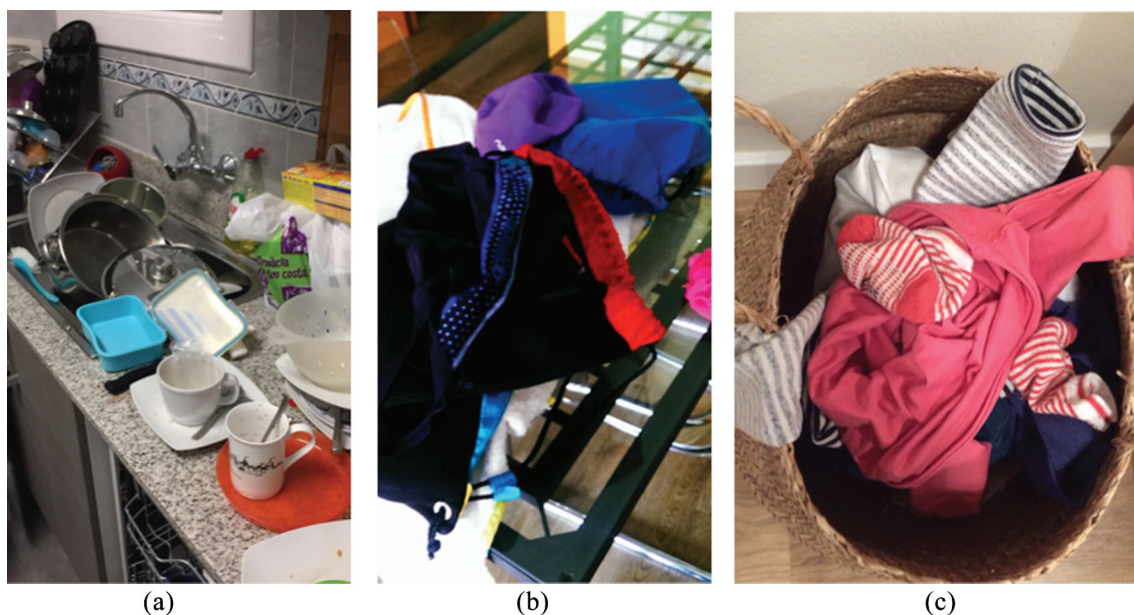


FIGURE 4. Bad times: household chores.

Sylvia and Mara in the previous section. However, it is a small-scale resistance, because the ‘breaks’ mothers seek take place at home, or, when leaving the house, they involve occasional trips to the markets or chats with a friend. Mothers secure less leisure, scheduled, personal time, compared to fathers.

Bad times: the housework antivalue

Both members of the couple clearly marked domestic chores as sources of stress. Washing dishes and doing laundry are tasks to be avoided. In [Figure 4](#), left, a sink full of dishes from dinner that Peter is due to wash; on the centre, a bag full of wet swimming suits that June cannot put in the washing machine because she is busy taking care of her three siblings; on the right, a full load of dirty laundry captured by Cristopher.

The evening-night time routines also appear as the most the difficult time of the day, with parents referring to the children being tired, and with things that need to be done against the clock (dinner, baths, meals for the next day). Evenings often become a moment of tension for the couple, tired and thus prone to nagging and other expressed frustrations:

From 7 [p.m.] Because they are tired, you have to bathe them, you have to make dinner. These obligations of the end of the day ... It's like; I want to close my eyes and [have them] already in bed. (Stephanie, 29, teacher, employed with a reduction).

We received several ‘bad moment’ pictures from that time of the day, such as the one in [Figure 5](#), described by Martha as follows:

The bath time logistics and making dinner on my own [are hard]. Not the moment of bathing him in itself, which it's cool because he has so much fun, this is why I took the picture without him. (Martha, 37, elementary teacher, leave of absence).



FIGURE 5. Bad moment: the evening routine.

Martha's quote and the absence of her son from the picture is a good example of the clear separation established between the instrumentality and materiality of care, and the emotional and relational aspect of it. The logistics of the bath are visually isolated from the personal interaction and emotional caring for her son. Playtime as good moments in both mother's and father's accounts from the previous stand out against the omnipresence of housework as bad moments in this section. This reflects the differential value attributed to care work versus domestic tasks, as highlighted in previous research (Carrasquer, Teresa, and Grau 2015; Hallberg and Klevmarken 2003). Moreover, in terms of Harvey (2017), but also Zerubavel (1997) and Hochschild and Machung (2003), household chores are the least valuable tasks for both parents, opposed to the pleasure of timed child play. This is also a relevant finding since it distances the interviewed mothers from the traditional housekeeping role, with symbolic and affective attachments to cleaning and doing house.

The Value of Paid Work

Interviewees did not mention work-related events as part of their good and bad everyday moments, since these were not directly targeted in the interviews. Nonetheless, paid working time appears as a general framework that conditions the overall daily schedule. Both men and women refer to the time pressures imposed by the employment sphere.

We are required to be a superwoman. You have to work, do well at work, to be the perfect mother, to be able to play [...] And I think it's too much [...]. You finish the day and you are tired, but you are tired because you haven't stopped all day. [...] What I would change would be this, a slower pace of life ... (Karen, 34, chief of marketing, employed part-time). You try to schedule things and it's impossible, it doesn't work. I went with my Excel files to my brother in law, who was also pregnant, and I said: 'The numbers do not add up ...' He told me to calm down ... that we would share the time [with the children]. (Derek, 37, industrial designer, full time).

Both parents seem to be aware of the existence of reproductive work that needs to be taken care of. They also report that the demands from paid work often crash with those of the family sphere. However, the response to such situation of imbalance remains clearly gendered. For instance, the disposition for taking parental leave is often conditioned in the fathers'

discourse by the Human Resources department or the work culture. Moreover, in the following quote the real barrier to asking for a leave is the cultural expectation linked to Zach's identity of 'being a man'.

When I started considering that I needed flexibility in my working hours, I realized that I had more flexibility than I thought ... [...] In the beginning, it seemed very strange to me to ask for a leave of absence or a reduction of working hours, being a man. (Zach, 39, computer consultant, employed full-time).

While fathers often express the desire of working fewer hours to spend more time with the family, it appears in their accounts as an impossible or unrealistic demand. For instance, when asked what they would change in their daily routine, Peter explains in the following quote how a reduction of working hours or other arrangements would entail a loss of status and/or income.

I would like to work fewer hours, clearly. But also, if they told me less work hours for less salary, I wouldn't change it, I couldn't do it ... (Peter, 36, investments and corporate development, employed full-time).

Here we clearly see the weight of productive value vs. the lightness of care antivalue (Harvey 2017). Masculine identity is based on the productive sphere, which ultimately represents a continuation of the male breadwinner model. In turn, the mother's domain is the antivalue sphere of care: Karen justifies her decision of taking a reduction from work because of child rearing priorities, as shown in the following quote:

Now, if I want to change jobs. What should I do? My current job is next to home, they value me professionally, and I work from 9 to 3 (in theory). If I renounce to all this it would be for a big salary, which would compensate for not spending time with my children. But I'd rather not have this large salary, and spend the time with my children. I'd rather they be with me than with a nanny. (Karen, 34, chief of marketing department, employed part-time).

Moreover, the flexibility provided by professional jobs may show a double edge for women (Lewis, Gambles, and Rapoport 2007). This is clearly reflected in Violet's account, who went back to work five and a half months after childbirth, but only after agreeing with her boss to work remotely with a reduced workload. Working from home has resulted in a total subordination of her work commitments to her daughter's needs, even when the father is there:

I told him [her boss]: if I can do it from home, I'll try. If not, it was clear to me that I would have said no. [...] So now, we have reconsidered this, and I don't work four hours exactly, I work when I can. [...] If she needs me, I go. I mean ... If John tries ... he tries to handle it, you know? But if I see that [...] the advantage of being here [home] is that I can go [to them]. (Violet, 34, architect, self-employed part-time).

Nonetheless, there are minority of fathers who modify their relationship with the labour market, and more specifically, who build a different set of cultural expectations that are an alternative reality of commodification. Their value time is not expressed primarily towards work, as is generally the case for the rest of the interviewed fathers. Seth's explanation of his reasons for leaving his job is to be able to care for their first child, at a time when his partner was going back to work:

For me it was a liberation, because really ... I used to arrive home at 7 in the evening, sometimes a bit later, and it was ... I was with the baby only during leftovers. From 7 in the evening it's the worst time for babies, you do not interact with them in any way, and I did not feel useful either. (Seth, 32, secondary education teacher, employed part-time).

Another case is Nil, who took an annual leave from work: in this quote he reports a conversation with a couple who worked as high-end executives in large corporations, who left their child with a nanny 12 hours a day and voiced during a dinner party their frustration. Nil, in line with Karen and Seth's expectations, reports being shocked:

They would hire someone to be with the child from 8am to 8pm, all day, because they worked until 8pm every day. And she said "And it's a drag because it is shameful to have to pay someone to do something I would kill for" And in my head I was saying ... Just do it! It shocked me. (Nil, 36, app designer, self-employed on leave).

All in all, expectations and expectations on time allocation remain markedly gendered. Those three quotes make explicit in terms of value the systemic conflict between productive and reproductive work. Notice that in the exceptional cases where fathers are willing to modify their relationship with the labour market, women may be defensive of the domestic sphere as being their own. In the following excerpt,

Violet expresses her strong disagreement towards sharing part of her maternity leave with her partner:

It's very important that the other person is involved . . . But, for instance, when they tell me that my fourth months of maternity [leave] can be shared . . . Well, sixteen weeks, and John can take two weeks, I say no, I don't want you to take that away from me, sorry! (Violet, 34, architect, self-employed part-time).

DISCUSSION

The interviewees' accounts of their everyday lives as parents are colonised by expressions of overlapping schedules, lacks of sleep, evening routines, and feeding habits. Despite significant commonalities in the topics and concerns discussed, the analysis of the interviews and the participant photography reveal how the uses and meanings of parent's everyday time remain highly gendered. Differences between mothers and fathers correspond to gendered expectations that follow a morality of social order.

A first relevant theme is how tiring and time-consuming childrearing can be. Nonetheless, while fathers save a personal time that cannot be accessed by their children, mothers are always available to cover the needs of her children. These findings are consistent with the literature (Zerubavel 1997; Hochschild and Machung 2003, Muntanyola-Saura 2014). The woman is always a mom while the man is father when he can or he wants (Torns and Moreno 2008).

Second, when asked about the good moments of their everyday life, interviewees often mention two different kinds of situations that oppose each other: play and rest. The ludic dimension of family time goes in line with Myrkänen and Leena Böök (2014) pleasurable time, and overlaps with Callejo's (2013) time for others. Playtime is a very intimate time that emotionally bounds the parent with the child (all three pictures sent by parents in Figure 1 include smiling or laughing children). Most importantly, these moments do not involve material or utilitarian household chores, which are marked as *anti-value* by both genders.

While play is pleasurable for both parents, this dichotomy finds different expressions based on gendered expectations. Mothers sent us pictures of the kids playing on their own or sleeping, while the fathers didn't. This gender difference is linked to the fact that the interviewed women are the primary careers. Since mothers spend more time with their children, their choice of pictures might as well be reflecting women's

more important time pressures, and thus their greater appreciation of their children's autonomy, allowing for any minor break within the walls of the house.

Third, household tasks such as doing laundry or the dishes are qualified as bad times in everyday life. Childcare represents a source of satisfaction, whereas domestic tasks are a source of discontent both for mothers and fathers, reflecting the differential values attributed to these activities. Moreover, a privileged position allows these middle-class parents to outsource an important share of domestic chores, so that those that fall into their hands (doing the dishes at night, for instance) are less of a burden and are done in haste.

Fourth, work is the backbone of everyday life, following the 'reason' of capitalism. The interviewees' jobs provide a high degree of flexibility, allowing some of them to work from home, to reduce working hours or take a leave of absence, among other options. However, the effective use of work flexibility as a response to conflicting work and family demands is highly gendered. Women remain as primary careers, by leaving the labour market temporarily or by reducing their work involvement, whereas most men do not change their relationship with the labour market. The negative logic of capitalism locates productive work as the only source of value. Consistently with the literature, flexibility measures are double edged for women (Lewis, Gambles, and Rapoport 2007), resulting in subordination of the mother's work commitments and personal needs to those of the children.

Fifth, in terms of gender expectations linked to parenting identity, the masculine identification with work persists. When being asked about work family balance, interviewed fathers claim that taking a leave only occurred to them on a second (or third) thought. Both parents renounce to reflexive decision-making. In fact, taking a parental leave is the mother's choice by default. Fathers are aware of the time demands of housework, and their conflicting nature with work schedules, but they fail to act on it. This qualitative finding goes hand in hand with the Spanish statistics on the use of parental leaves, anecdotal for fathers, paramount for mothers (Barbeta-Viñas and Muntanyola-Saura 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

This research analyses the gendered uses and experiences of parenting time, revealing the gendered structures of everyday life. During the interviews,

parents were asked to discuss good and bad moments, which gave us useful additional information in order to understand the meanings attributed to the gendered allocation of time at face value. As argued in the theoretical section, subjective expressions of value for one task or other, or for one schedule or another, are not necessarily the product of verbal negotiation. The methodological innovation of producing a joint commentary of these photographs as photo-elicitation contributed to our understanding of the parents' gendered expectations.

A minority of parents are aware of the contradiction that implies work family and life balance in a capitalist society. For Harvey (2017, 77) in such contradiction lays a possibility for resistance and change: Anti-value thereby defines an active field of anti-capitalist struggle. They act on the side, by not participating in the 'rationality' of the value/antivalue dichotomy, which entails the subversion of gendered expectations on time. Mothers do not comply with the mainstream demands of full-time availability for parenting time, while fathers identify as caring figures as well.

All in all, negotiation has a very limited space in the daily life of households. The analysis of the interviews and photos reveals that time use in parenting is a result of differences in gendered time use. The good and bad moments of shared experience that build the couple's daily life become small adjustments of ways of doing and saying in the framework of multiple everyday activities. On the one hand, the photos of bad moments represent domestic chores without the presence of the child, while playing includes interacting with the child. Such difference in representation is an indicator of the emotional distinction between the materiality and instrumentality of housecleaning as opposed to the corporality and intimacy of child play. On the other hand, only mothers choose as good moments visual representations of the child sleeping or being autonomous. Such evidence backs of the fact that females take responsibility on a daily basis, while fathers' involvement in care is selective, in terms of the when and the what: the segregation of activities persists.

How parents organise their time and deal with work is not a strategic outcome, but the consequence of culturally acquired expectations in a capitalist society organised by the value/ antivalue polarities. Moreover, time allocation of parenting tasks is not the outcome of negotiation, but the product of a gendered construction of social reality. They are the relational consequence of the structured value of time in capitalist societies.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1. List of interviewees: Pseudonyms, Age, profession, employment status, number and age of children at the time of the interview.

Couple	Age	Profession	Employment Status	Children
Mila and Nil	36 and 36	Architect + App Designer	Full Time+ Self-employed	11 months
Laia and Alan	38 and 37	Filmmaker + Sociologist	Self-Employed + Full Time	4 months
Mara and Colin	37 and 36	Art Manager + Publisher	Reduction+Full Time	10 months
Gala and Olaf	38 and 36	Elementary Teacher + Civil Engineer	Reduction+Full Time	2 and 5 years old
Olivia and Derek	37 and 37	Industrial Designers	Full Time+Full Time	8 months
Martha and Joel	37 and 40	Elementary Teacher + Industrial Chemist	Leave of Absence +Reduction	8 months
Celia and Roman	36 and 37	Industrial Designers	Unemployed+Self-Employed	6 months
Violet and John	35 and 34	Technical engineer + architect	Self-Employed Part-time + Full-time	9 months
June and Christopher	37 and 33	Chief of logistics + Postdoctoral researcher	Full-Time + Full-Time	14 months
Peggy and Thomas	35 and 41	Research technician + Research technician	Part-time + Unemployed	18 months and 3 and a half years old
Florence and James	40 and 40	Data analyst + Teacher	Reduction + Full-time	2 years old
Karen and Peter	36 and 34	Relations with investors and corporate development + Chief of marketing	Reduction + Full-time	3 years old + 8 months
Stephanie and Seth	32 and 29	Teacher + Teacher	Reduction + Part-time	3 and 1 years old
Sylvia and Zacharia	39 and 37	IT consultant + Lawyer	Full-time + Reduction	3 years old