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## Sons' Perspectives on Time with Dads

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### **Abstract**

Drawing on a study of fatherhood across three generations, including those of Irish, white British and Polish origin, the paper applies a temporal perspective to how children and young people viewed and experienced fatherhood. Mirroring time approaches to the study of parenthood, it conceptualises time in relation to three dimensions. First, it looks at how sons report spending everyday time with their fathers – when they see them and which activities they engaged in together. Second, it examines relational time – how sons valued their relationships with their fathers. Third, it examines sons' views and feelings about their fathers' employment in the context of long hours, increasing insecurity and intensification of paid work. The paper concludes with two case examples to illustrate how fathers' time for parenting is experienced by sons. In the context of the ways in which hegemonic masculinities have impeded emotionality and closeness among men, this paper investigates sons' experience of fathering through the lens of time, with implications for possible changes in models of fatherhood and masculinity.

*Keywords:* Fatherhood, sons' perspectives, time, fathers' working hours, generational relations

*Ansichten von Söhnen über die Zeitverwendung mit ihren Vätern*

### **Zusammenfassung**

Basierend auf einer drei Generationen umfassenden Studie über Vaterschaft, darunter Väter mit irischen, hellhäutig britischen und polnischen Wurzeln, gibt dieses Paper einen zeitabhängigen Einblick, wie Kinder und junge Menschen Vaterschaft wahrnehmen und erleben. Es konzeptualisiert Zeit in ihrer Beziehung zu drei Dimensionen und greift damit zeitbasierende Ansätze der Erforschung von Elternschaft auf. Zunächst betrachtet es, wie Söhne die mit ihren Vätern im Alltag gemeinsam verbrachte Zeit wahrnehmen, wann sie sich sehen und welche Aktivitäten sie gemeinsam erleben. Zweitens untersucht es, wie Söhne die Beziehung zu ihren Vätern bewerten. Drittens untersucht es die Ansichten und Einschätzungen der Söhne über die Erwerbstätigkeit ihrer Väter im Kontext langer Arbeitszeiten, gesteigerter Unsicherheit und der Intensivierung von Lohnarbeit. Abschließend untersucht das Paper zwei Fallbeispiele um zu zeigen, wie Söhne die Zeit wahrnehmen, die ihre Väter für die Kindererziehung verwenden. Vor dem Hintergrund hegemonialer Männ-

lichkeit, die Emotionalität und Nähe zwischen Männern lange verhindert hat, untersucht dieses Paper das Erleben von Vaterschaft durch Söhne im Zeitverlauf. Daraus werden Schlussfolgerungen über mögliche Veränderungen der Leitbilder von Vaterschaft und Männlichkeit gezogen.

*Schlagworte:* Vaterschaft, Sichtweisen von Söhnen, Zeit, Arbeitszeit von Vätern, Generationenbeziehungen

## 1 Introduction

Family studies have paid less attention to men's family lives compared with those of women. In particular there is a gap in the literature on same sex male intergenerational relationships. In relation to the focus of this paper on sons and their relationships with their fathers, the research indicates "an embargo on close, dependent contact" (Frosh *et al.* 2002, p. 264) and hence the importance of investigating if this is changing. Funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, the study of fatherhood upon which the paper draws adopted an intergenerational lens, focuses on grandfathers, sons and grandsons in thirty families of Irish, white British and Polish origin. It applies a biographical approach to examine how different generations and 'ethnicities' engage in fathering and the experience of being fathered; how migration influences fatherhood; and the processes by which fathering as practiced is transmitted.

An intergenerational approach can shed light on processes and patterns of change providing an important socio-historic and biographical backdrop about not only fatherhood but associated masculinities (e.g. Brannen/Nilsen 2006; Finn/Henwood 2009). But what do sons think about fathers and fatherhood during the contemporary experience of being parented? Perceptions of one's own father and socio cultural constructions of a "good" father are important intersecting reference points for children and young people and are mediated by social class, ethnicity and family history.

In this paper we focus on the grandson generation aged between 5 and 17 (henceforth referred to as sons). We adopt a temporal lens to understanding their perspectives on fatherhood from the vantage point of being parented. Mirroring time approaches to the study of parenthood, we conceptualise time in relation to three dimensions. First, we examine how sons report spending everyday time with their fathers – when they see them and which activities they engaged in together. Second, we examine relational time – how sons valued the time they spend relating with their fathers. Third, we examine sons' views and feelings about the time fathers spent at work in the context of the British long hours culture and the increasing insecurity and intensification of paid work. We also inject a life course perspective, taking account of how age influences the way sons spend time with fathers, their relationships with them and their own interests and concerns. The paper concludes with two cases to illustrate how fathers' time for parenting is experienced by sons.

## 2 Temporal approaches

### Every day time

Time can be understood chronologically and can be quantified. Thus a key way in which parents' contribution to children's lives has been assessed relates to the *amount* of time spent with children and in caring for them on an everyday basis. In Britain men typically increase their working time when they become fathers (e.g. *Biggart/O'Brien* 2010; *O'Brien/Shemilt* 2003) and work longer hours than mothers (e.g. *Biggart/O'Brien* 2009). This holds true even after controlling for factors such as earnings, education and partner's work status. Men's higher earnings also encourage the prioritization of men's careers (e.g. *McDowell et al.* 2006). Fathers' commitment to work is not only due to their provider role. Work is a central identity for many men who would not consider replacing their jobs with caring for children (e.g. *Perrons/Plomien/Kilkey* 2010). Interestingly, middle class men do not see spending time with their children as an indicator of their responsibility for and commitment to children (e.g. *Dermott* 2005).

Time studies consistently indicate that fathers' share of childcare has been growing, and they are spending more time with their children (e.g. *Pleck/Masciadrelli* 2004; *O'Brien* 2005). However, recent research has shown that although the gap is shrinking, mothers remain the primary caregivers (e.g. *Gauthier/Smeeding/Furstenberg* 2004; *O'Brien* 2005). Research further suggests that the activities of mothers and fathers differ in so far as mothers spend more time in physical caring, whereas fathers spend more time playing and talking (e.g. *Sayer et al.* 2004; *Craig* 2006).

Time spent with fathers alters with a child's age, both within the home, and outside (e.g. *Clarke/O'Brien* 2004). For younger children their role in play has long been noted (e.g. *LaRossa/LaRossa* 1981; *Parke* 1996; *Dienhart/Daly* 1997). For children under 10, shared family time (e.g. mealtimes, days out) is significant but tends to diminish as children get older (e.g. *Gilbey et al.* 2008). The balance between different forms of caring activities changes, as young people seek and gain more independence from their families. Fathers provide moral and other forms of guidance and help young people in decisions about their futures (e.g. *Lewis/Welch* 2005). Working class fathers have traditionally been important in helping sons to find jobs (e.g. *Allatt* 1995). Moreover higher income families have less family time at home and more days out reflecting cash-rich, time-poor lifestyles (e.g. *Gilbey et al.* 2008).

### Relational time

A second temporal lens is relational time. The meaning of parents' time with children is shaped by "Western ideals of family togetherness, positive engagement and children-centeredness" (*Daly* 2001, p. 292). A good parent is moreover widely understood in terms of the quality of their relationships as well as the time spent with children. However, as *Gillis* (1996) points out, family time also engenders stress. While family times are "fondly remembered and anxiously anticipated" (*ibidem.* p. 17) they are often experienced as stressful and frustrating; in terms of gender and generation families are furthest apart when they are together.

Much of the research on children's own views of parenting also suggests that children place importance on close family relationships (e.g. *Brannen et al.* 2000). Children in both early and middle childhood considered parents and other close family to be central to their lives (e.g. *Borland et al.* 1997; *Brannen et al.* 2000). They appreciated opportunities to engage in activities with their fathers that they did not do with their mothers (e.g. *Brannen et al.* 2000). Children wanted parents to take an interest in their day-to-day life, to provide them with money, protection, love and physical affection (e.g. *Milligan/Dowie* 1998). In *Cawson et al.*'s (2000) study with young people aged 18-24 more than nine in ten described "very close" or "fairly close" relationships with mothers and more than three quarters with fathers.

This does not mean that children equated mothers with fathers. When asked who they turned to most often for advice and help, more participants named their mothers than their fathers (e.g. *Cawson et al.* 2000). Fathers were seen as less likely to offer closeness, support and good role models than mothers, and 20 percent were "sometimes really afraid" of their fathers. *Stace/Roker* (2005) found that young people reported fathers to be less involved in monitoring and supervision than mothers. This was due to mothers being at home more and fathers working longer hours. Many young people also felt that they could talk to mothers more easily than with fathers about their day-to-day lives, and therefore told their mothers their whereabouts and activities more than their fathers. *Langford et al.* (2001) found that teenagers said they felt closest to their mothers. Fathers were often described as the family disciplinarian, and sometimes as coercive or even threatening.

Much of the way sons relate to their fathers is moreover governed by their shared gender. Boys perceive their fathers as more playful and joking than their mothers, easier to chat to, often laid back, and even more childish (e.g. *Frosh et al.* 2002). Through "fun" with their fathers boys learn the "acceptability of a certain kind of humour and the way in which it defines masculine intimacy" (*ibidem.*, p. 235). Interestingly, however, the joking character of fathers also may make it harder for many boys to confide in them when they have something important and serious to say. Therefore when they need help, comfort or emotional release, boys tend to turn to their mothers as several studies suggest.

### Fathers' working time

A third lens relates to concepts of the "time poverty" or "time squeeze" experienced by working families (e.g. *Hochschild* 1997). In part this relates to parents' employment hours. Fathers in the UK have higher average weekly working hours than other men and work the longest hours in Europe (e.g. *O'Brien/Schemilt* 2003).

In Britain the proportion of dual earner families escalated from the late 1980s. Employment was simultaneously deregulated, bringing with it the demise of jobs for life, rising felt job insecurity, lengthening working hours and, with the IT revolution, greater intensification of work and blurring of boundaries between work and family life (e.g. *Lewis et al.* 2009).

At the family level, these family time pressures have combined with greater institutionalisation of children's lives and the growth of extra-curricular activities for children (e.g. *Vincent/Ball* 2007). The different domains which children and parents inhabit, often simultaneously, intersect creating irreconcilable temporal experiences. The conditions of

asynchronicity (e.g. *Brose* 2004) and time acceleration (e.g. *Rosa* 2007) are constitutive of the experiences of many working parents (e.g. *Brannen/Sadar Černigoj* in press). As *Gillis* (1996) argues, family times work best when they are ritualised and unchanging. However, as he also observes, that this is precisely the problem for working families because they cannot afford to stick to rigid divisions of labour and time.

Against this background the discourse of the nurturing caring father has emerged as a key component of late modern fatherhood (e.g. *Thompson et al.* 2005; *Henwood/Proctor* 2003) so much so that some have asserted that breadwinning is no longer a defining feature of fathers' identities (e.g. *Williams* 2008). However, the one does not preclude the other. Many would argue that fathers' identity and role in family life is still tied up with their status as breadwinners (e.g. *Lewis* 2000).

The question arises as to how fathers' working time and the time squeeze are experienced by children. In a study looking at adolescents' views on parents' working hours, *Lewis et al.* (2008) report that half the sample wished to see more of the parent who worked the longer hours, usually the father. Sometimes the desire for parents to reduce their hours was because of the spill over of stress from a parent's job. A market research survey of over 2,000 parents of children aged 0-19 and 1,000 children aged 10-19 found that around half of parents felt they lacked sufficient quality time with their child, particularly fathers who were working full-time (e.g. *Gilby et al.* 2008). On the other hand, the literature suggests that some children, especially older children, may be happy with the time their fathers spend with them. For example, the 2000 Time Use survey data found that adolescent children were not concerned about the presence or absence of their parents and some enjoyed time alone without parents (e.g. *Lewis/Noden/Sarre* 2008; *Christensen* 2004). Children's views may therefore be at odds with parental concern about a time squeeze (e.g. *Daly* 2001; *Milkie et al.* 2004). On the other hand, where parental time with children is a prescribed norm, then children are likely to be attentive to the constraints on their parents' time and resentful when time devoted to them is scarce.

### 3 Research design and methodology

Because of the study's aim to understand the intricacies and complexities of intergenerational relationships and the processes of transmission across generations, we adopted a case study design using qualitative methods. Furthermore, the study focussed on the impact of the context of migration on fatherhood in relation to Irish, Polish and white British groups. The specificity of these groups and the difficulties of identifying the Irish and recruiting the Polish in turn limited our choice of design. The intention was not to generalise in a statistical sense but to understand the specificities of cases while setting them in wider social contexts (e.g. *Brannen/Nilsen* 2011).

Three generational chains of men were recruited in London and Southern England (e.g. *Wigfall et al.* in press); eight chains of first generation Polish (migrant) fathers, their fathers living in Poland, and their sons (plus two chains of second generation Polish fathers); ten chains of second generation Irish fathers, their fathers born in Ireland, and their sons; ten chains of white British fathers, their fathers born in the UK, and their sons. To understand lives over time within the resources available we used a biographic-interpretive method (e.g. *Wengraf* 2000) with the two adult generations. For the older

sons, aged 12 and above, we used a semi-structured interview approach. With the younger children, a variety of research tools – a mix of questions with drawings, stickers and visual materials, were employed that worked well, and which children seemed to enjoy. In total 89 interviews were conducted including with 30 grandfathers, 30 fathers and 29 sons.

The sons were aged between 5 and 17 years. Initially we thought to focus on teenagers, but because of the age of the Polish fathers, few had sons old enough to fit this criterion. We therefore lowered the age range to five years. While ideally, we were hoping to interview young people alone in order to preserve confidentiality, we could not exclude parents if they insisted, and indeed a few fathers did sit in, particularly the Polish fathers who expressed rather more concern about their sons taking part. Some parents “hovered in the wings” and occasionally intervened. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. Most sons of the Polish fathers were interviewed in Polish, usually at the fathers’ insistence, by the Polish member of the team.

Overall, the sons were fairly evenly divided between primary and secondary age, with the majority falling in the range between 8 and 14 years (e.g. Table 1).

Table 1: Age and ethnicity of sons

|         | White British | Irish | Polish | Total |
|---------|---------------|-------|--------|-------|
| 5 - 7   | 2             | 2     | 1      | 5     |
| 8 - 10  | 4             | 2     | 4      | 10    |
| 11 - 14 | 2             | 3     | 5      | 10    |
| 15 - 17 | 2             | 2     | 0      | 4     |
| Total   | 10            | 9*    | 10     | 29    |

\*One Irish son declined to be interviewed

Most of the sons were in families with two or three children (20/29). Around half (15/29) were the only boy in the family, and in three of these cases they were the only child.

#### 4 Sons’ every day time with dads

We did not attempt to conduct a detailed analysis of time use but asked sons to tell us about when they saw their fathers, and what they did with them on a day to day basis. For many, time with their fathers during the week was very limited, because of fathers’ work routines and children’s busy schedules. Some children said they hardly saw their dads in the morning. Eight year old Finn’s father is a doctor, and Finn only sees him in the morning if he happens to wake up in time. Nine year old Alfie told us how he sets his alarm clock for 6.00 each morning so that he can have breakfast with his dad before he leaves for work at 6.45. They spend this time talking about: “*Stuff like what we’re going to do today, and what challenges we have.*”

Similarly, in the evening, children said that dads often came home too late to see much of them. Hugh, a lawyer, had managed to reduce his working hours to a 10 hour day, so that he now got home around 7.30 p.m. His 16 year old son, Myles, took it as given that his dad worked long hours. He told us in his interview that his dad was rarely

home before 9.00 p.m. but his family waited to have dinner with him, and because Myles stayed up late, he did not feel he was missing out on what he called “*fatherly experience*”. He admitted however that they had never had special times but felt there had never been a need for this.

Dads who worked shifts or flexible hours were around more during the week, to take children to or from school, or to after school activities, often fitting this in with the mothers’ work schedules.

But in the majority of cases, it was at weekends that sons saw their dads most, while for some this was virtually the only time they saw them. Polish fathers in low status jobs tended to work the longest and had the least flexible hours and had the least time to spend with their children. Hendrych, aged 12, described his dad’s work routine as a lorry driver: “*he leaves on Monday and comes back on Friday, which is annoying. He spends time with us on weekends, so he makes up for it.*”

The sons reported engaging in a variety of activities with their dads. These reports contrasted with fathers’ accounts of childhood, noting in retrospect that their own fathers had spent little time with them. Younger children identified what they did with dads by circling or ticking pictures of different activities. Their responses indicated the range but not the frequency of activities. Activities given the most ticks included; taking them to the park, playing games with them, engaging in rough and tumble and playing with toys. Some sons indicated that they went on walks and bike rides with them. Reflecting the technological focus of young people’s lives, playing on computer games with them – usually Playstation or Wii, were circled, although it was also fathers who restricted this activity. Children from Polish families more often ticked outdoor activities, such as camping and fishing, and building and making things with them, thereby drawing on their fathers’ practical skills.

Dads got drawn into ferrying sons to extra-curricular school activities at weekends. In Irish families, they took sons to church; Polish dads took their sons to Polish Saturday schools or Polish scouts in order to encourage them to hold on to their Polish heritage.

The younger children were also asked to identify what mothers and fathers “generally do” by circling or putting stickers on images of various childcare tasks. These responses give an indication of the gender division of labour but do not distinguish relative contributions where tasks were shared. For example, many sons identified dads and mothers looking after children, helping with homework, bath time, and putting children to bed, but some then qualified this, saying their mothers did these things more often than their dads. However, when it came to domestic tasks sons suggested roles were highly gendered, with washing up, cleaning, cooking, tidying up still very much the domain of mothers.

The activities that older sons engaged in with fathers differed; typically they said they spent more time doing things with friends outside the family. Several middle class sons talked about “*sharing more adult things*” with their fathers such as theatre, listening to music, watching films or television together, in one case having political discussions. Sons also referred to talking to their dads, who provided them with help, guidance and encouragement related to schooling, deciding upon careers, and getting jobs.

Virtually all the boys, both younger and older, said they were involved in some kind of sporting activity with their dads – football, swimming, cricket, tennis – either playing with, being coached by or watching sports with them. As 17 year old Owen suggested, his interest and love of sport was influenced by his father: “*cos I’m the only son, I think he wants to – he wanted me to do what he done, like play football and be sporty*”. Father-



son activities tended to be gendered therefore, sons spending time with their dads doing “boys things”, daughters with mums doing “girly things”.

Everyday time spent as a family was clearly valued. For instance, 8 year old Jake (only son, white British) liked it best when he was at home with both mum and dad: “*I just like doing anything because we are just here as a family*”. In the same way, day trips and family holidays were frequently mentioned as some of the best times spent with dads. Sons also talked about the importance of doing things alone with dads, without mum or siblings. Ten year old Ivan said it felt: “*really, really good being alone with dad ... we talk about lots of stuff, like what he is doing at work and what I am doing at school and stuff like that.*”

## 5 Sons' relational time with dads

Turning to the lens of relational time, we found that both the fathers and grandfathers perceived marked changes across the generations in the relational aspects of fatherhood. Current fathers rejected the idea of the traditional father – seen as authoritarian, disinterested, absent, emotionally distant – in favour of a “good father” who is a caring, nurturing, emotionally close and easy to communicate with (e.g. *Mooney et al.* forthcoming; *Burgess 1997; Craig 2006; Dermott 2008*).

Most fathers saw themselves as emotionally expressive with sons, contrasting their own fathering with their experiences in childhood described as conforming to the model of the emotionally distant, traditional father. What evidence was there for the caring, emotionally involved father in the accounts given by sons in our study? When asked to define what they thought of as a “good father” sons tended to refer to what a good dad should *do* – play football, take to places, buy things – but also to what sort of person he should *be* – cool, funny, polite, kind, not get angry or shout, care for children, be understanding, supportive, encouraging, nice, someone to talk to, someone who listens. Fourteen year old Mitch talked about “*having a good connection*”. Younger children especially mentioned physical closeness, enjoying cuddles and hugs with their dads. Some said they would hug their dad as a way of saying sorry, or giving thanks.

While a good dad should be someone you can talk to, when it came to confiding, or talking about problems, more sons said they would talk first to their mothers usually because they were more often there, or because they were more sympathetic. Some said they went to their mothers for some things, such as health, and to dads for other things, such as practical problems. However, several said they felt they could talk to either parent, and that it would be a case of whoever was available at the time. Sons also expressed concerns about their dads – if he worked too hard, or got stressed, or was not happy. One ten year old Polish son was worried something might happen to his lorry driver father when he was away on long shifts. He wanted to be a lorry driver when he grew up to sit beside his dad to get help if needed.

Sons did not see their dads as authoritarian. For the most part, they respected that boundaries had to be set, and thought that punishments were reasonable. Several considered that their mothers were stricter than dads. Some mentioned getting upset when their dads shouted or got angry, but only one said that he was scared by this. Anger was some-

thing some fathers expressed guilt about in their interviews, when they were not able to control their tempers, especially when they were tired.

Teenagers said they spent more time doing things with friends outside the family, which might mean less time in their fathers' company. However some also said that their relationships with their dads had grown stronger over time. The turning point seemed to be the transition to secondary school. Growing maturity brought greater mutual understanding, having more things in common, but some talked about going through tense patches. Seventeen year old Steve recalled a difficult time with his dad in his early teens, when he felt his father was pressuring him too much and he used to lie to him about his activities, but he now recognised his dad's motivation was for him to do well.

## 6 Sons' perspectives on dads' working hours

All except one of the study fathers was working at the time of the interview; one Polish dad had recently lost his job and was hoping soon to get a new job. His son however said he preferred his dad to work as life is easier with more money.

Breadwinning was not explicitly mentioned by sons in talking about what makes a good father. However the economic benefits of their own dads working were readily acknowledged. Dad is the "*guy that brings the money in*" according to 14 year old Mitch. They especially welcomed the consumption aspects of their dads working – money to spend on presents or toys for the children, computer games, and expensive holidays. At the same time they recognised that dads worked hard.

While the sons endorsed the time fathers spent in the workplace, some also expected them to be involved and to spend time with them. But for many fathers, the constraints of the job seriously impacted on their ability to do this (e.g. *Mooney et al.* in press). Sons were fairly evenly divided between those who said they wanted more time with their dads, and those who felt they had enough time with them. However, there was an age dimension; younger sons generally wanted more time with their fathers while teenagers tended to say that the time was "about right". Some younger sons made frequent references to this, regretting their fathers' long working hours. They described dads coming home after a long day "*grouchy*" and too tired to play with them. Several of the Polish sons indicated they felt their dads worked too much, and that as a result they, the sons, were missing out. Thirteen year old Lucjan thought his dad, a construction worker, must work hard in his job because "*when he gets back he has a shower and goes to bed*". Feliks, aged ten, similarly talked of his dad going to bed before him. Older sons, on the other hand, were more accepting. Seventeen year old Sean's dad travelled extensively in his job. When he was growing up, Sean simply took it for granted that "*dad's not there, and your mum is, to support you*". Now, even when his dad was not away and worked at home, he shut himself up in his office. Nevertheless Sean considered that they have enough "father-son time".

A few sons aspired to having jobs like their fathers, primarily to achieve a similar life style, with good pay. More often though they had no such ambition, mentioning things that they disliked – their fathers' long hours, the stress, the travel, the administration, and "too many meetings".

## 7 Two case examples

Through the three time lenses we may examine the day to day experiences of two sons as they relate to their fathers. The two sons are of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, family composition and socio-economic background. They have been selected on the basis of their fathers' contrasting employment situations.

*Table 2: Two Case Examples*

|                         | <b>Rory (8)</b>                 | <b>Charlie (16)</b>               |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Fathers                 | Willie (37)                     | Ray (46)                          |
| Siblings                | 1 brother(7)<br>1 sister (4)    | Only child                        |
| Ethnicity               | Irish                           | White British                     |
| Social class            | Middle                          | Working                           |
| Fathers' work situation | High status<br>Less flexibility | Low status<br>Greater flexibility |

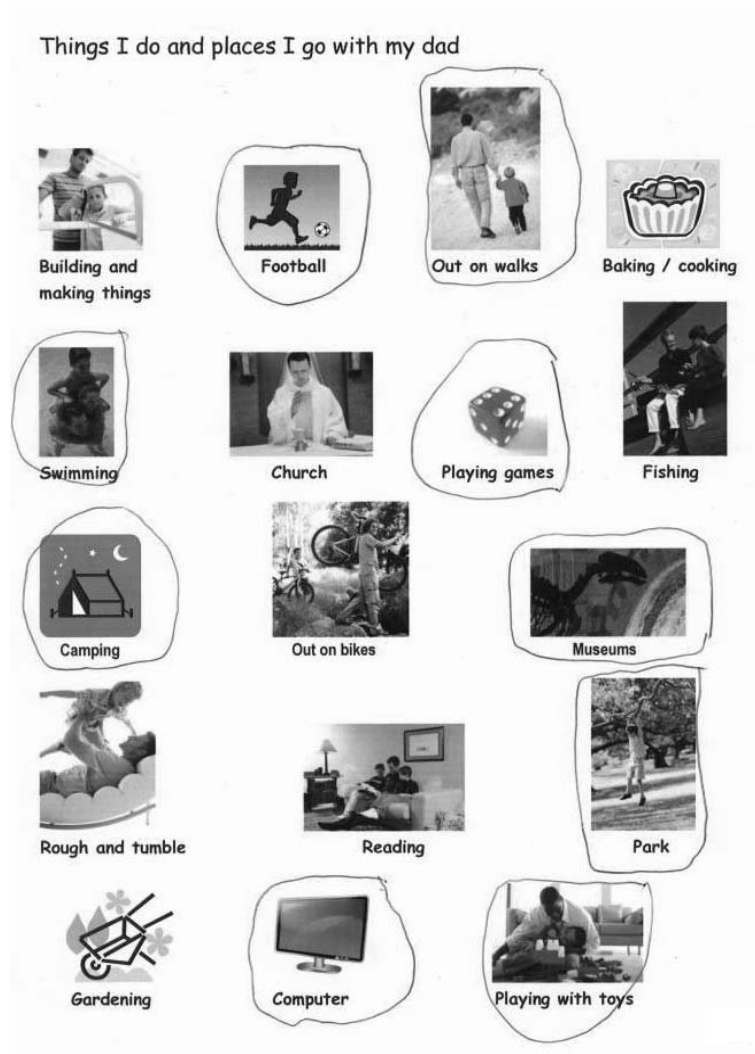
Rory is 8 years old, the oldest of three, has a seven year old brother and four year old sister. His father, Willie, is a banker of Irish origin who is a manager in a large international bank. Willie is very committed to his job which offers no flexibility and he works very long hours. The grandfather in the chain, a construction worker, migrated from Ireland at the age of 17, and now lives with his wife a few doors up the street from Rory's family, on the edge of a wealthy area in London. Rory was interviewed on his own. The interview lasted nearly one and a half hours.

Rory's mother has not worked since the birth of his sister. Rory's dad is a case of upward social mobility in which he reproduces the strong work ethic of his Irish migrant father. His high powered job severely impacts upon the time available for his children. Though he works very long hours, Willie admitted that he had cut his hours slightly since changing jobs. Before that, he was out of the house at 6.30 and not back until 9 or 10 at night and never saw his children during the week. Now he sees them for about 15 minutes in the morning, and 40-45 minutes in the evening.

Rory's definition of what it means to be a good father has both a practical and a relational element. He talked of a good dad as someone who "*helps his children, shows kindness, is loving, and takes care of you*", and these were the same qualities he referred to when describing his dad.

On the Activities sheet, Rory circled the following activities he did with his father; football, walks, swimming, playing games, museums, the park, camping, playing with toys and on the computer, though the latter he said was strictly rationed by his dad (e.g. Figure 1).









Figure 1






Asked what mums and dads do, his responses clearly demonstrated the division of labour in the household, with his mother mostly doing all the domestic chores, because he said she “*worked*” there (e.g. Figure 2). Other than fixing things, his dad’s contribution was limited to sharing help with homework, children’s bath time and putting to bed. Rory thought his dad *should* help his mum more around the house, but suggested he needed more practice, when he could not even cook sausages without burning them.

Figure 2

Use the star stickers to show what mums and dads do

| Activities                                                                                                  | Mums | Dads |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
|  Cooking/baking            | ★    |      |
|  Helping with homework     | ★    | ★    |
|  Household cleaning        | ★    |      |
|  Washing up                | ★    |      |
|  Looking after children    | ★    |      |
|  Tidying up                | ★    |      |
|  Mending clothes          | ★    |      |
|  Putting children to bed | ★    | ★    |

| Activities                                                                                                     | Mums | Dads |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
|  Fixing things                |      | ★    |
|  Helping children at bathtime | ★    | ★    |
|  Gardening                    | ★    |      |
|                                                                                                                |      |      |
|                                                                                                                |      |      |
|                                                                                                                |      |      |
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While Rory suggested a close relationship with his dad, in his social network diagram Rory was unusual in placing his dad and brother in the second circle, with mum and sister in the inner one, because he said they “love me a tinsy bit more”.

Rory was extremely conscious of his father’s work conditions and returned to the topic several times in the interview. The subject first came up early on in the interview.

I: Do you know what kind of job he does?

R: Banking.

I: Do you know anything more than that, what sort of thing it is?

R: No not really, just banks.

I: And is it a hard job do you think?

R: Mm, well yeah, because sometimes he’s in a meeting and when there’s an argument then sometimes he isn’t back till like 2, 3.

I: In the morning?

R: Yeah. Which I get really annoyed with.

I: Why? Why does it annoy you?

R: Um, because I like um giving him a hug before we go to bed, and when he’s not home I just (pause) then I just (pause) just doesn’t really feel right to me.

I: Yes. And does that happen often?

R: ot very often, sometimes we go to bed and he’s not there. And then he gets in like 5 minutes after we go to bed (Oh right) and sometimes I’m still awake.

Later in the interview, on a sheet about “Time with dad” Rory wrote very slowly and painstakingly that he would like more time with his dad “because I do not get to see him often because he is at work”. He wrote that he likes his dad “when he’s home from work

early”, and feels cross with him “*when he’s not home early. When I ask him to help with my homework but he doesn’t*”.

He showed real concern about his father working so late, recounting at some length one occasion in particular.

“...when because once I was woken up in the morning and I went in (pause) when my mum was up I went into her room and I still couldn’t find dad. And when I got back from school he had just arrived back home from work. He had been stuck there – there had been an argument and he came home sleeping. (Oh dear. And did you try to help him?) Yeah ...(pause) he just looked really tired. And so (pause) then he slept for like 14 hours and then mum just really needed him, so we went up and put an ice cube on him, and he woke up like that’ (clicking fingers).

Willie confirmed in his interview the importance of work in his own life. He wanted to progress up the career ladder, and valued his wife’s support in this. Though he said his working hours had lessened, he did not feel that this had made any real difference to his fathering because he still saw so little of the children in the week because they were tied up with after school activities. He was reasonably happy that he spent enough time with them. Willie described himself as “*slightly more engaged*” with Rory than his own father had been with him. Yet in many ways, he was repeating the parenting model of his own upbringing in his high commitment to his job and the segregation of responsibilities within the family. At the same time, he subscribed to the modern discourse of involved fathering and said he made a conscious effort to be “engaged” in the time he spent with his children.

Charlie is sixteen, the only child of Ray who is a postman. The family lives in an owner occupied ex council house in London. His grandfather worked before retirement for a utilities company and then for a security firm; he too lives in London. Charlie was interviewed after school for one hour 40 minutes.

Charlie’s mother has worked full time as a financial administrator since before Charlie was born and is, Charlie said, “*sort of the brains*” in the family, earning the higher income. Ray’s job offers him some flexibility, largely because his shift pattern enables him to be home more during the day, and thus to take on a greater share of the caring and domestic tasks in the week, which was evident from Charlie’s account.

Roles in the family were said to be equally shared; dad cooked the dinner in the week, did the shopping and cleaned downstairs and mum cooked at weekends and cleaned upstairs. So for Charlie, his mum and dad “*do the same things*”. They also cared for him in the same way, which he considered made life easier.

As a dad, Ray did a lot of things with Charlie, primarily focused around sport. Football is Ray’s life, a passion he shares with his own father. All three support the same team, and go to watch most of their matches. Charlie plays football with his dad, either in the garden or the park, and they play golf together. Charlie is also a black belt in martial arts. Dad takes him to training every week, and usually stays to watch the class. In Charlie’s view, it is easier for a boy to bond with his dad, because they share the same interests, whereas girls like “*make up and that*” and he thought it would be harder for men to spend time on such things. Charlie recounted how once a year he and Ray enjoyed a special night together – they called it “boys night”, when mum was at her office Christmas party. He and dad ordered a pizza, played games, watched a film “*just sort of like me and him like*”.

Charlie described his relationship with his dad as happy: “we get on fine, like me and my dad ... I like to joke around and my dad likes to joke around a lot, so we joke around

together against each other quite a lot, mucking about". While he engaged in more activities with his dad, he said he was equally close to his mother. As a teenager Charlie noted having "little arguments or disagreements" with his parents. He considered this to be normal for teenagers. He said his mum and dad call this "attitude" and put it down to his growing up. Both are strict with him, his mother more so than dad. Dad is more likely to let him get away with things, but is short tempered, particularly when Charlie backchats his mother.

Though Charlie did not see dad in the morning when his dad was on a day shift, he clearly valued the fact that his dad was there when he got home from school, and when his mum was still at work. Charlie preferred this regime to his dad's night shift, for while he then saw more of dad in the morning, their evening time together was more limited. Because his parents both work, Charlie says the family has enough money for everything they want, including holidays abroad. Charlie worried however that his dad; he felt he did too much overtime and he also worried about his mother's responsibility at work: "*But like she doesn't want to be like the boss, the manager – she don't want to like take all that responsibility. But she is like busy all the time, constantly*".

For the most part Ray's account endorsed Charlie's narrative, although the description Ray gave of their relationship suggested greater intensity than Charlie indicated. As an only child, Ray's relationship with Charlie is obviously very different from that of Willie with Rory, given Willie has three children. Ray has been closely involved in Charlie's care since Charlie was a baby, and talked of "*living through his son*". Ray said he tells Charlie every day that he loves him when Charlie phones him on his way to school. The photos Ray brought to the interview to talk about showed the two on holiday, dad's arm clasped affectionately around Charlie's shoulders.

In his interview Ray reflected on his own upbringing and could not recall his father ever showing any love or affection toward him. He did not think that he was not loved, simply "*mum was there for me, dad was away*". On the other hand, as the only boy in a family of five children, Ray's relationship with his father focused on their shared passion for football, but beyond this, he gave the impression that he was never close to his family, a situation which has continued into adult life.

## 8 Conclusions

The application of time to understanding sons' experiences of being fathered, accounts which were generally supported by fathers in their interviews, shone a light on different, often competing aspects fatherhood and what it means to be a son in contemporary society. A temporal lens has also shown that time can be understood in different ways signifying more than the quantity of hours. Time is a medium that also connotes meanings associated with time spent in different contexts and relationships.

First, by focussing on everyday time we have addressed a key area of family research concerning men's involvement with their children. By examining the issue from sons' perspectives our analysis has highlighted both patterns of change and continuity in the gendered division of household labour and parenting. While sons identified a wide range of activities that they did with their dads, both individually and as a family, they also suggested that the dads' contribution was limited. With exceptions like Charlie's dad who

worked shifts, more sons suggested that fathers' childcare and domestic roles were gender-segregated. Father-son activities were moreover typically centred around "boys things" like sports.

Second, through what we have called relational time this analysis suggests that sons valued their fathers and their relationships with them. This not only reflects the discourse of the "involved father" but also the general contemporary emphasis on the relationality of family life, in particular togetherness and emotional closeness. According to fathers this contrasted with their own upbringings, in which they characterised their fathers as emotionally distant or generally unavailable. Relationality is also a theme which captures sons' expressed concern for their fathers especially in the context of what they considered to be heavy constraints from their jobs.

Third, we turned to the context of fathers' employment and how sons viewed and felt about their fathers' work and working hours. At issue here was not so much a questioning of men's commitment to breadwinning which is a key theme in the fatherhood literature but the practical conditions which impinge upon men's fatherhood practices and on sons' experiences of these, especially in the context of sons' expectations of the importance of being close to their fathers. While sons seemed to welcome the material aspects of their fathers' employment, in particular its consumption benefits, many were critical of the toll work took on their fathers and in particular on the time they had to spend with them. Notably, the younger children wanted their fathers to spend less time working and more time with them. In the examples we contrasted the case of Rory who wanted to see more of his work-oriented father with Charlie, an only child, who welcomed the benefits afforded by his father's shift work pattern to spend more time with him. While Charlie and his father Ray shared strongly gendered/masculinised interests and activities, Ray also provided a positive future role model as a father and a transformative model of masculinity for Charlie; through having taken an active part in Charlie's care and sharing the domestic work with Charlie's mother, while Charlie's mother had the higher status job. Rory's father, on the other hand, provided a more traditional role model of fatherhood and masculinity, with his at home mother taking on the major responsibility for childcare and household.

However the socialisation of sons and intergenerational transmission take place not only in one direction. As we have seen in both the cases, Rory and Charlie offer positive role models for their own fathers in their expressed concern for their parents' welfare. We may conclude that sons are active agents in the processes of socialisation both in terms of responding to the conditions of their upbringing but also in acting upon them.

In the context of the ways in which hegemonic masculinities have impeded emotionality and closeness among men, this paper has indicated how sons experience fathering. We have suggested how sons value fathers' time with them in terms of activities and relationships, and how they view the constraints upon their fathers' time because of the pressures of work. This evidence offers some hope of change for this next generation of young men in their future adult lives.

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