

## **The Luxury of Time: Can Single Parents Afford to `Do Gender`?**

The sexual division of labor in the household has captured the interest of scholars for decades. Men have classically been seen as the primary breadwinner and women have been seen as the caretakers of the hearth, home, and children. This division of labor has given rise to societal expectations regarding the “proper” behavior for men and women. Men and women live out their lives following gender-prescribed norms of masculine and feminine behavior, affirming their gender identity by embracing one and rejecting the other. This participation in gender-specific behavior has often been referred to as “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Key support for the doing gender perspective is found in research showing that men and women do in fact spend their time in different activities: men orient themselves towards providing for their family while women orient themselves towards nurturing and caring for home and hearth. Accordingly, studies of men’s and women’s time allocations to paid and unpaid activities are important sources of support for this perspective. To date, however, studies of time use have focused on two-parent families and single mothers. The few studies that have extended the research to include single fathers have suffered from sample sizes far too small for comparisons and have not evaluated how predictors of time allocations differ between single fathers and other family types.

This study will test the validity of the doing gender perspective in the context of single father households. Single parents must essentially take upon themselves the traditionally female roles of childrearing and housework as well as the traditionally male role of breadwinning. Thus, by dint of not having a partner, single fathers and mothers are presumably unable to affirm their gender identity by focusing solely on either the spheres of paid work or the unpaid labor. Nevertheless, single fathers and mothers may still differ in their level of engagement in these activities. Using the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) and regression models that first account for the decision to engage in activities, we assess time allocations to paid and unpaid work across a more inclusive set of family types, paying particular attention to single fathers and mothers’ time use patterns.

Contrary to the doing gender perspective, we do not find evidence that single fathers spend more time in traditionally male activities such as paid work, nor evidence that they avoid traditionally female tasks such as childcare. The lack of statistically significant differences between single fathers and single mothers’ time use patterns suggests that single fathers do not conduct their lives according to gender-prescribed activities. The only statistical support we find for doing gender is single mothers’ greater time spent on housework.

Predictors of parental time use across family types provided further support for our hypothesis that single parenthood constrains parents from “doing” gender. The doing gender perspective would predict unemployed and labor force nonattached single fathers would compensate for this gender-atypical status by decreasing their time in traditionally female activities such as childcare. Instead, we find that single fathers increase their time in routine childcare even more than single mothers. This suggests that rather than having the luxury of affirming their gender identity single fathers adapt, substituting time that would have been spent on paid work for time caring for their children.