# Togetherness in the Family

**Spending time with a partner is a major gain from marriage/partnership. Surprisingly, little is known about how couples value togetherness (time spent together with the partner), what benefits and costs togetherness accrues, or how it interacts with other uses of time. I address these issues in my new paper Togetherness in the Household, to appear in the next issue of the American Economic Journal - Microeconomics.**

**The evidence**
The LISS survey in the Netherlands suggests that over 90% of households report having some joint leisure, namely leisure in the company of each other. Often, joint leisure is almost one-half of each person's total leisure. Part of childcare is also joint between partners, e.g., in the form of family outings. The data thus suggest that togetherness, be it in the form of leisure or in the form of childcare, is a substantial part of family time use.

**The benefits and costs of togetherness**
While joint leisure is desirable on the grounds of companionship and joint childcare is beneficial on child developmental grounds (enhancing communication and closeness in the family, and improving children's cognitive skills), the two have large costs.

First, togetherness requires spouses to synchronize their schedules to be physically together at the same time. So those who like joint time may have to renounce a job that requires flexibility. Yet, being flexible at work often pays a wage premium, e.g., in high responsibility jobs where work schedules are irregular or unpredictable. Togetherness requires synchronization of schedules which may be impossible without restricting one partner's flexibility at work and possibly reducing their earnings.

Second, joint childcare hampers division of duties between partners and hurts specialization at home. Young children typically need attention for a given amount of time, say 8 hours per day, which usually requires only one adult. Suppose that each parent has 4 hours available per day for childcare. If parents supply childcare privately, they supply 8 hours in total. If they supply it jointly, they only offer 4 hours while, for the remaining time, care must be provided by another, perhaps costly, caregiver.

**A model of family time use**
We develop a model of family time use featuring the above-mentioned benefits and costs of togetherness. The model allows us to understand how time use is affected by economic circumstances, such as wages in the labor market, the timing of market work, or the costs of day nurseries. It also allows us to monetize the additional value that joint time has over private time: we find that households on average are willing to pay up to 17% of their wage to replace private leisure or childcare with joint.

**Togetherness and the gender gap**
Our model suggests that the spouse who works fewer hours in the labour market is also the one who forgoes work flexibility to increase togetherness. In the Netherlands, women work fewer hours than men due to lower pay or other reasons. Our model suggests that women will then restrict flexibility on the job to synchronize work with their husband's and increase togetherness. Women, not men, forgo flexibility because it is less costly for them to align their fewer work hours with their husbands'. If flexibility pays a premium, women then forgo such premium, which in turn reinforces any preexisting gender wage gap. ●

**Alexandros Theloudis**
*"I am an assistant professor in the Department of Econometrics & OR. My work is on quantitative household economics, studying the interplay between decision making in the family and inequality in its many forms. I also work on income dynamics, which is in many ways a related topic. I am a Greek, who studied in England and who lives in Amsterdam."*

