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Beyond the "Stalled Revolution": Stay-at-Home Fathers, Gender Identity and the Division of Household Labor

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Beyond the “Stalled Revolution”: Stay-at-Home Fathers, Gender Identity and the
Division of Household Labor

by

Aundrea Janae Snitker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Sociology

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how stay-at-home fathers view their role as the primary caregiver, and how they encounter opposing masculinity issues. This is explored through discussion about daily life, the decision to stay home, and household labor, a particularly interesting reflection of gender roles and equality. The two research questions used to explore this included: How do stay-at-home fathers understand their masculinity and social role? How does talk about the negotiation of household labor in stay-at-home father/career mother families illustrate masculinity issues? Through an analysis of interviews of eight present or past stay-at-home fathers, I capture the ways that these fathers describe and discuss the stay-at-home parent role. By looking at how these men define and interpret the specific challenges they face while in this role, I help tell the stories of stay-at-home father/career mother families, and understand whether these families, too, experience Hochschild's "stalled revolution."

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States today, there are approximately 5.3 million stay-at-home parents of which 5.1 million are stay-at-home mothers and only 158,000 are stay-at-home fathers. The remaining includes families where both parents stay home (US Census 2010). Since the 1960s, women have been entering the workforce at an increasing rate (Coontz 2005). This trend is in conjunction with the decline in men's ability to fulfill the provider role, resulting not only from the increase of women in the workforce but also from the deterioration of men's absolute earning power due to both underemployment and increased unemployment (Zuo and Tang 2000). Concurrent with these changes, men's beliefs about conventional masculinity are challenged (Aldous 1998, Bulanda 2004).

The ratio of women to men in the paid labor force is growing; however, this is not consistent with the rate of change negotiating shared household labor. In her book, *The Second Shift*, Hochschild refers to this as the "stalled revolution" (1989). While women now make up over half of the paid workforce, they continue to do the mass of household tasks as well. For many women, their reality includes working outside the home during the day, only to come home to take on the responsibilities of homemaking and childrearing. This means working the equivalent of an extra month a year (Hochschild 1989). While women continue to add to the paid workforce, their male partners are not increasing their household labor at the same rate (Kunovich and Kunovich 2008). The patterns in the division of household labor have changed for both men and women:

women are currently doing less than in previous years, with their partners responsible for more of the household labor (Coltrane 2000; Bianchi et al. 2000). Women, however, continue to do the majority of the work. This “stalled revolution” raises questions about the men and women committed to changing gender roles and how they struggle with their new identities.

In this context, men who stay home with their children, while their partners work, are of particular interest. These stay-at-home fathers are competing with traditional ideals of masculinity while their wives are taking on the provider role, reversing traditional parenting gender roles. While these changes have affected caring for children within the household, has this role shift also presented gender identity challenges to these men? In addition, are these changes also affecting the division of household labor?

The purpose of this study is to explore how stay-at-home fathers view their role as the primary caregiver, and how they encounter opposing masculinity issues. This will be explored through discussion about daily life, the decision to stay home, and household labor, a particularly interesting reflection of gender roles and equality. Through an analysis of interviews of eight present or past stay-at-home fathers, I will capture the ways that these fathers describe and discuss the stay-at-home parent role. By looking at how these men define and interpret the specific challenges they face while in this role, I hope to help tell the stories of stay-at-home father/career mother families, and understand whether these families, too, experience Hochschild’s “stalled revolution.”

The study was conducted among stay-at-home fathers in Portland and Salem, Oregon. Although previous quantitative research has been able to capture what the

division of household labor is within couples, this study explores how stay-at-home fathers negotiate the complex gender identity issues that result from going against hegemonic masculine ideals. In order to gain a deep understanding of this individual issue, I used a qualitative approach. I did not record data on the amount of time spent on housework and the different types of tasks completed, but rather sought to use the topic of household labor as a window into the complex construction of the role of stay-at-home fathers. The struggle to divide household labor is relevant here not as the focus of this study, but as a fertile topic for talk about gender and how stay-at-home fathers feel about taking on a traditionally feminine role as the primary care giver.

In this study I explore two questions: How do stay-at-home fathers understand their masculinity and social role? How does talk about the negotiation of household labor in stay-at-home father/career mother families illustrate masculinity issues? The intent of my research is to understand how fathers frame their role as the stay-at-home parent in spite of society's portrayal of the model for masculinity. By focusing on how the division of housework is negotiated, I can see how masculinity is played out in different ways within the family's home. The interview schedule that was designed to talk about these issues, however, was open enough to allow other issues to emerge, as will be seen later.

Study's Significance

This study will shed light on issues surrounding the task of constructing a relatively new and counter-hegemonic gender identity. By hearing these men talk about

their experiences, it will bring attention to the role gender role acquisition these men deal with as stay-at-home fathers. Through this, we can see if Hochschild's "stalled revolution" applies even to these gender-pioneer families.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will first briefly review the recent history and current structure of the family in the U.S. I will then discuss two theoretical contexts useful in this study: hegemonic masculinity and gender construction theory. Finally, I will review relevant literature in two areas: first, previous work on stay-at-home fathers and second, the relation of household labor issues to elements of masculine identity.

Changes in the U.S. Family

In order to put the current situation of the stay-at-home father into context, it is important to briefly note how past sociological literature defined the family and gender roles. Although the demise of the family in the United States has been often predicted throughout the years, the family has exhibited enormous resilience. Today, the American family is alive and well, and so is the hegemonic structure known as the Standard North American Family (SNAF). Anthropologist David Schneider defines that family as a “cultural unit contain[ing] a husband and wife who are the mother and father of their child or children” (1980). Within this arrangement of the nuclear family are specific roles for men and women. Women are expected to bear and care for the children, because in American culture, women are viewed as nurturing, a quality that is thought to come naturally (Schneider 1980). In comparison, the burden of economic support is held by men (Parsons 1943). Because men are unable to bear children, the hegemonic concept asserts, they are not naturally endowed with the knowledge needed to care for children

(Schneider 1980). From these cultural norms or ideas come accepted gender roles within the family. The husband is assumed to be the main breadwinner while his wife is responsible for the care of the home and children (Parsons 1943; Schneider 1980). Hochschild's "stalled revolution" suggests that even among dual-career families, these traditional gender role identities are asserted. It is in this context that stay-at-home fathers face the task of constructing their own caretaker role within the family, while going against traditional ideals of masculinity.

While some families fit into the SNAF definition, the majority of families are not constructed this way (Goode 1982). While the realities of family composition may be changing, the gender role hegemonies associated with this household configuration are still strong.

The roles for parents in the United States have not always been what they are today. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, American fathers were viewed as the moral teachers for the family (Pleck 1987). While, as today, women were responsible for the majority of the child care, the teaching and character development responsibilities fell on the fathers. Unlike later in US history, these fathers were less likely to go outside of the home in order to provide for their families. Instead, many family members worked side by side on the family farm (Coontz 2005). This allowed fathers to be more involved in child rearing (Coltrane 1996). In addition, fathers were regarded by the church to be the ultimate source for moral and worldly guidance (Pleck 1987). Because women were viewed, at the time, to be weak and vulnerable, they were seen as unfit to guide their

children away from their sinful desires (Coltrane 1996). It was left to fathers to be responsible for their family's well-being.

With the Industrial Revolution came economic and political changes that impacted how daily income was earned (Coontz 2005). Cottage industries and agricultural communities began to suffer and many families relocated to urban areas in order to find employment, forcing men and boys to find work in factories (Coltrane 1996; D'Emilio 1983). It was at this time that the ideal of men as the "breadwinner" came into play (Schneider 1980). No longer were fathers able to be home as often to teach and guide their children as before, causing a shift in roles for mothers (Coltrane 1996). Now mothers began to take on a more hands-on role in raising the children while fathers began to take a less direct role in child rearing. With these changes came an ideological shift. Now, the woman's role was seen as appropriately more focused on the home and children while the man's role was seen as properly focused more on making a living and working in the world (Coontz 1997). While fathers tended to still be the moral guides for their children and families, it was done in a less direct way, usually through the mother (Schneider 1980).

As a result of this, as well as in reaction to the end of World War II, the role of mothers in the lives of their children was eventually questioned. War forced fathers further outside of the family home and into the world giving women the opportunity to gain independence by joining the workforce and caring for the home on their own (Coltrane 1996; Coontz 1992). Numerous families did not see the return of fathers and husbands and for those families that did, changes in women's role within the home

impacted the family structure (Schneider 1980). One result was a rise in divorce rates (Coontz 1992). In fact, of those couples who married in the 1950s, almost a third would eventually divorce (Coontz 2005). With the absence of a father figure, many began to question the importance of the male role model, especially for boys. Although fathers were still seen as the distant breadwinner, it was as a result of this time that men began to see the need to provide a stronger role model within the family (Schneider 1980).

Also in the 1960s, with the publication of Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) came changes for women as well. Instead of continuing to stay home with their children, many women looked for the opportunity to work outside the home. With more women leaving home to find employment in the workforce, changes in the family structure was inevitable. In 1948, approximately 17 percent of married mothers were working outside the home. By 1960, the number of married mothers in the workforce was approximately 26 percent and continued to rise every decade (Coontz 2005). In 1985, 61 percent were in the workforce and only ten years later, the percent of married mothers working outside the home reached 70 percent (Cohany and Sok 2007). The number of families with both parents working was increasing. Because of this, parents began to reconfigure the division of household labor and time spent child rearing (Coltrane 1996). For many families, however, the majority of the housework and child care continued to fall on the woman.

Today, with approximately half of the workforce being women, families have been forced to change. While women continue to do the majority of the housework, men

have increased their “helping” (Braun et. al. 2008), contributing between 20 and 35 percent of the household labor (Shelton et.al. 1996).

Masculinity

In 1963, Goffman describes the traditional image of the American male as “a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height and a recent record in sports.” Goffman observed that if men do not fulfill all of these characteristics all of the time, at some point, many men will feel inadequate, inferior, or unworthy.

This insight of Goffman’s is continued today through the concept of hegemony and hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995) uses the concept of hegemony to describe the one form of masculinity that is exalted over all others. It is hegemonic masculinity that guarantees the dominant position of men. For men, this hegemonic masculinity is constructed in comparison to women as well as to other inferior masculinities (1987). In modern Western culture, the idea of masculinity exists only in contrast to femininity (Kimmel 2006). Therefore the roles of men and women are considered opposites. This highlights what is expected of men based on the hegemonic masculine ideal. Men who are not able to compete with these expectations, like stay-at-home fathers, Connell asserts, will deal with it in three ways: try to overcome the situation in order to meet hegemonic masculine standards; change their definition of masculinity to be more realistic while still pursuing masculine themes like independence and control; or reject hegemonic masculinity (1995). The cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinity may not

actually correspond to how the majority of men act. Instead, hegemonic masculinity is often involved in the creation of models of what men should be. These models reflect what is expected from men. Although few meet these expectations put on by the moral elite, struggles and feelings of inadequacy and guilt are common among those who do not conform (Connell 1987).

Contemporary research on masculinities suggests that gender roles can be traced to the social dynamics that are produced through gendered relationships (Shows et al. 2009). For married couples, household labor becomes one tool in which couples negotiate their gender roles. Taking on the household work as a woman, or avoiding it as a man, reproduces masculinity and femininity (Brines 1994, Coltrane 1995). It is also suggested that through involvement in relationships within the home, men provide a place of institutionalized inequality as well as a place for the construction and expression of masculinities (Shows et al. 2009). Strong cultural expectations of who does housework and cares for children allow for men and women to act out certain roles, reaffirming what it means to be masculine or feminine (Presser 1988). By acting out these gender roles, the home becomes a critical site for “doing gender,” (Coltrane 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Gender Construction Theory

As mentioned before, a second useful theoretical context for this study is gender construction theory. West and Zimmerman (1987) assert that gender influences every aspect of daily life. They claim that while biological attributes are part of gender, it is

irrelevant when talking about gender in social analysis. Gender is recreated by individuals through their interactions with others. It is important how individuals view themselves based on their sex; however, it is important to social analysis to understand how individuals express their gender in a social context. Based on society's expectations of the behaviors and appearances of men and women, individuals are continually displaying and acting out their gender. They write:

Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the "essentialness" of gender [137]. We have claimed that a person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and recurrently, in interaction with others [140]. If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals – not the institutional arrangements – may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions) [146].

By taking on roles that are traditionally masculine or feminine, individuals continue to create these differences in gender. Struggles come to the forefront when men are faced with hegemonic masculine ideals that they do not live up to. Because gender is not an

achieved status but something that is continually influencing all aspects of life, we are all constantly creating our gender roles.

To account for the continuing disparities between men and women with regard to household labor in dual-earner households, gender construction theorists propose that these differences continue to exist because women and men have constructed the appropriate gender roles based on traditional ideals (Bianchi et al. 2000, Ferree 1991). The differences in time spent on household labor between husbands and wives are then a reflection of how they view and understand gender roles (Erickson 2005, Risman 2004, Twigs et al. 1999).

Gender constructions theory views the acquisition of gender in a way that contrasts sharply with the views of mid- 20th century sociology. At this time, sex-role theory was used to explain how people acquired gender. From the beginning, it was believed that children were taught to act feminine or masculine, from the clothes they wore to the activities they were encouraged to participate in. By teaching children what it was like to take on the feminine or masculine role, it was assumed that children would grow up to act out “normal” gendered roles (Miller and Garrison 1982). Girls would grow up to be passive, compliant and pretty. In comparison, boys learned to be demanding and aggressive. As adults, males and females would act out these learned “sex roles.” It was assumed that these “sex roles” would be acquired through socialization (Connell 2002).

This model assumes that learning gender is passive and not something that people actively do. West and Zimmerman (1987) reject this idea in their discussion of how

individuals are constantly “doing their gender” in everyday actions. Instead of gender being innate, we are constantly consciously or unconsciously thinking about how to show our gender.

Gender construction theory posits that gender is not a set of fixed traits but instead socially constructed boundaries determining gender (Zuo 2004). Gender construction theory emerged in the 1980s, emphasizing the ongoing structural and interactional processes that produce and reproduce gender. Within the family, by performing certain family roles, couples continue to “do gender.” (Ferree 1990, West and Zimmerman 1987). This theory suggests that men and women are actively constructing the division of family work in ways that reproduce and affirm their gendered concepts of themselves.

Gender construction theorists have looked at the issue of household labor. Family work tends to be divided up based on how individuals understand their concept of gender (Ridgeway and Correll 2000). For example, a woman in a more traditional relationship tends to do a larger portion of the household work than her husband. This is because household work tends to include traditionally feminine tasks. She is more likely to take care of these tasks because this is how she performs her gender role. For more egalitarian couples, the woman is more likely to do less of the household tasks than her traditional counterpart (Erickson 2005). The way couples decide to divide their household labor then continues to affirm and reproduce their concepts of gender. Because of this, women tend to be held as well as hold themselves accountable for family work in ways that men are not. By doing this, family work is more “central” to how women construct their gender. Their behavior will reflect these expectations and therefore reproduce these

gendered concepts (Twiggs et al. 1999; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender construction theory tries to separate specific gender roles from the gender of the individual (Zuo 2004).

Stay-at-Home Fathers

Today, in the United States, approximately six to seven percent of families have stay-at-home mothers providing care for their children (Barnett 1996). In comparison, one to two percent of families have stay-at-home fathers providing primary care for the children (Rabin 1996). Much research has investigated stay-at-home mother families (Rubin and Wooten 2007; Gorman and Fritzsche, 2002; Vejar et al, 2006), but few studies have primarily focused on stay-at-home fathers. Some studies have focused on multiple issues, with stay-at-home fathers as a subset of a larger population (Zimmerman 2000; Whelan & Lally 2002). This new trend of stay-at-home father and career woman families is changing how individuals act out their gender roles within the family (Zuo & Tang 2000).

Doucet (2004), one of the only studies focusing on stay-at-home fathers, interviewed 70 present and past stay-at-home fathers in Canada. Her qualitative study included married, single, heterosexual and homosexual men. The focus of this study was on men who decided to stay at home with their children rather than working in the outside world. Doucet found that these men stayed connected to paid labor, community work and other traditional male interests. She found that the majority of fathers retained close ties or links to the paid work force. This was true even for fathers who had

permanently left the work force. Fathers replaced an investment in fulltime labor force with “self-provisioning” work such as fixing cars or wood working. This allowed them to contribute to the household and display masculine practices. According to Doucet, staying home with their children meant redefining the hegemonic ideas of masculinity and creating new forms of masculinities for these fathers. She is interested in how fathers understand themselves as men and how they act while in a traditionally female role. Doucet does not look at how household chores are divided in these non-traditional households.

In another qualitative study of stay-at-home fathers, Zimmerman (2000) compared stay-at-home mothers with stay-at-home fathers, focusing on marital equality and satisfaction. Zimmerman interviewed twelve presently stay-at-home mothers and twelve presently stay-at-home fathers. Interesting differences were apparent. While all twelve mothers in the study labeled themselves as stay-at-home parents, only ten out of the twelve fathers labeled themselves as such. Similar themes did emerge between stay-at-home mothers and stay-at-home fathers. According to Zimmerman, both parents shared a strong belief in the importance of at-home parental care. The emphasis was on the importance of one parent staying home with the children. Also, both women and men in this study felt that society does not appreciate or value the stay-at-home parent, regardless of gender. Both stay-at-home mothers and stay-at-home fathers reported loneliness and expressed feelings of stress due to their own high expectations.

Despite many similarities, several differences emerged as well. The decision as to which parent would stay at home was different for many stay-at-home fathers compared

to their women counterparts. While stay-at-home mother/career father families had discussed this arrangement before marriage, it was not the case for stay-at-home father/career mothers. It was instead based on the practicality of the mother's salary and benefits. In addition, while most of the stay-at-home mothers planned to continue the arrangement long-term, stay-at-home fathers were less clear about their future plans. On average, stay-at-home mothers stayed 6 more years in their role than stay-at-home fathers. Another difference between stay-at-home mothers and stay-at-home fathers was community and social relationships: these fathers did not participate in community activities or seek out other stay-at-home parents as often as stay-at-home mothers did. Lastly, the fathers reported receiving less support or approval at first and felt that they had had to earn it overtime (Zimmerman 2000).

These two theoretical contexts, masculinities and gender construction theory, are important in understanding the context in which stay-at-home fathers are creating this new role. Also relevant for setting the context for this study is the literature on the division of household labor, an area of great interest and one through which the household contest of gender roles has been studied.

Division of Household Labor

Differences in how men and women view their gender roles as stay-at-home parents can have an impact on the division of labor within the home. Numerous studies have looked at the division of household labor based on different measurements. One study measured specifically what types of tasks each person was doing within the

household (Kroska 2004). Another study focused mainly on the division of specific tasks with regards to whether specific tasks were seen as traditionally feminine, traditionally masculine, or gender neutral tasks (Shelton et.al. 1996). In that study, women were responsible on average for 63 percent of all household labor while men were responsible for 37 percent. Results showed that tasks were allocated based on gender, with women doing the majority of feminine tasks and men completing the majority of masculine tasks. Tasks seen as gender neutral were generally split equally.

One aspect of the division of labor is actual time spent participating in household labor. The main ways of measuring this include time diaries and direct questions about the division of household labor (Gershuny and Robinson 1988). In a study by Braun et al. (2008) one possible factor influencing the disparity in time spent on household tasks is time spent working outside the home. The first testable hypothesis focuses on women and their time spent working outside the home: The more time a woman works outside the home, the less disparity between the couple in time spent on household tasks. The second hypothesis focuses on the time men spend working outside the home: The more time a man works outside of the home, the more disparity between the couple in time spent on household tasks. Previous research (Coltrane 2000; Gershuny & Sullivan 2003) indicates that as women enter the work force, the disparity in time spent on household tasks between married couples, decreases, however, women continue to be responsible for a greater portion of household labor than men within heterosexual married couples.

The current literature points to another variable that has an impact on the division of household labor between heterosexually married couples. Research shows that

couples with higher education can lead to a more equal distribution of household labor (Klumb et al. 2006). The findings on the effect of educational level on the division of household labor indicated that men's educational level is positively associated with their participation in housework and negatively associated with their spouse or partner's household labor time (Miller and Garrison 1982). Also, Shelton found that the educational level of women tends to be negatively associated with the time they spend on household labor (1996). Current literature suggests that couples who both are highly educated have less disparity within the marriage (Bianchi et al. 2000; Gershuny and Robinson 1988;).

Lastly, current literature points to income as a variable that can have effects on the division of household labor among heterosexual married couples (Bianchi et al. 2000; Presser 1994). Davies and Carrier (1999) examine the jobs women hold outside the home as well as how this income affects the division of household labor. They find that while the level of income a woman brings into the home can have an effect on the disparity in time spent on household tasks, the level of income a man brings to the home has little effect except among men with income in the lower brackets. For families where the man brings home more money, household labor is used as an exchange between the husband and wife, with the wife doing more household labor. In families where husbands rely on their partner for economic support, the less likely they are to help with household tasks (Brines 1994).

When men take on the traditionally feminine role of child care, and perhaps household labor, within the family, both husbands and their wives must reexamine how

they “do” their gender. In challenging what it traditionally means to be feminine or masculine, both partners are pioneers facing the task of redefining their gender roles. If parents adopt non-traditional gender norms in their parenting roles, as is the case with stay-at-home fathers, is the way they “do gender” reflected in other aspects of family life, such as household labor?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this study, in-depth interviews were used to examine and understand the construction of the identities of stay-at-home fathers. This is a descriptive study focusing on stay-at-home fathers and how they understand their own masculinities in the counter-traditional role of stay-at-home father, and how that is both illustrated and played out in the division of household labor. Questions are modeled after Zimmerman's (2000) approach in her study of marital equity and satisfaction in stay-at-home mother and stay-at-home father families to allow for general comparison. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to capture the stories of individual stay-at-home fathers. By talking with these individual fathers, I was able to give a voice to their specific, personal stories. While surveys may have been helpful in gaining a broad understanding of a population, the personal experiences of these fathers would be lost. Through individual interviews, I was able to gain some of the nuance that would not be possible through survey methods.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through acquaintances and colleagues. I interviewed eight men who are either currently staying at home or previously spent at least a year staying home with their children. Four of the participants are currently living the Portland area, three participants currently live in the Salem area, and one participant is from Southern California. Five interviews were conducted in local coffee shops and lasted approximately thirty minutes; one interview was conducted over the phone; one

interview was conducted in the home of the participant; and one interview was conducted on the Portland State University campus.

Potential participants were contacted via an email message that explained the purpose of the study. I also explained that I had been given their contact information through a mutual acquaintance, that their participation in the study was completely by choice, and that their identity would remain anonymous. Of the ten men I emailed, eight were willing to speak with me about their experiences as a stay-at-home father, giving me a response rate of 80 percent. Of the two men who were contacted but were not interviewed, one did not respond and due to scheduling, the other man was not able to meet with me.

In addition, participants were asked if their wives would be interested in answering some questions about the division of household labor. Participants were given my information and had the opportunity to forward it to their partner, if they wished. The effort to recruit the wives of the original participants was a side interest and therefore a low-key effort. Nevertheless, three of the eight respondents' wives contacted me and were willing to answer questions via email. Therefore, the response rate for women participating in this study was 38 percent. Because I relied on participants to pass on my information to their wives, the women may not have received my contact information, resulting in a low response rate.

In sum, this study is designed as a descriptive study focusing on how fathers construct the stay-at-home role in what is traditionally considered a feminine sphere. The participants were chosen based on their role as the main child-care providers within their

marriage. Interview data allowed for a descriptive analysis of the decision to stay home, struggles and experiences as stay-at-home fathers.

Instrument

Interviews were semi-structured, allowing for participants to volunteer personal stories and experiences. My goal was to make participants feel as comfortable as possible and allow the interview to flow more like a conversation rather than a structured interview.

While the interviews were open-ended and in the form of a conversation, the interview questions served as a guide, in order to ensure specific topics were discussed. The semi-structured interviews were divided into three sections. First, I asked about how participants made the decision to stay home with their children rather than work full time in the paid labor force. I then asked more about the daily life and activities of the participants and their children. The goal was to understand some of the experiences these fathers had while staying home and raising their children. I began interviews focusing on fathers' daily experiences because it was an easy topic for participants to talk about and it was helpful to learn some of the context in which participants took on this role. The next section focused primarily on household tasks and how they were divided within the home. I was interested in not only the types of tasks and time spent on household labor, but also the feelings of these fathers towards the division of housework. The goal of this section was to bring to light any issues fathers had toward the division of housework within their home. The focus of the final section was on how participants felt toward

their role as a stay-at-home father as well as if they planned to continue in this role in the future. I was interested in any struggles they had experienced within their own ideology or based on society's reaction. These questions were asked last because I felt it was important that participants felt comfortable answering these questions. By saving them for the end of the interview, I asked them after rapport was established and participants understood the context in which I was asking them, to discuss these possibly sensitive issues.

Interviews with participants' wives were done through email correspondence. The main focus of these interviews was the division of household labor. By corresponding with the wives of participants, I was able to hear another perspective on how the household tasks were divided within some families. The first three questions focused on the division of household labor and whether the current arrangement would continue into the future. The final question asked how the wives felt about their husbands' role. Because the main idea of the interview was to get a fuller picture of the household work, those questions were asked first.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each of the eight interviews was audio recorded in order to enable transcription and coding of the data. Audio recordings were stored in a password protected file to ensure confidentiality and then interviews were then transcribed by the investigator. The interview guide was reviewed by the Portland State University Human Subjects Research

Review Committee. In addition, the names of participants have been changed in order to ensure confidentiality.

In addition, I took notes during the interview as well as immediately following of participant reactions, including observation of their non-verbal communications such as moments of apparent gender discomfort. Analysis of these notes will add depth to the recorded interviews through the added detail. Before I began interviewing, I established observational goals as well as a systematic way of recording observations, in order to provide as much detail as possible on specifically established issues. Observational goals included looking for emotional reactions to certain questions or subjects in order to understand what is important or salient to the participants. I also looked for moments of uneasiness in order to help guide the interview as well as see how those feelings related to what was being said. After transcribing the interviews, I coded each section, looking for emergent themes. The analysis of the interview data in this project was rooted in grounded theory. The common methods of grounded theory, such as memos and coding, were used, as described by Charmaz (2006), in order to allow themes to emerge.

The analysis was completed in several phases. First, the transcribed interviews were coded for themes based on what was expected from the interview guide. The main focus was on the stay-at-home fathers' understanding of their role within society and how they feel about participating in a traditionally non-masculine role. A second look at the data revealed some main themes based on the importance participants put on their experiences. This was the next stage of data analysis. Finally, the transcripts were coded a third time, in order to find unifying concepts.

In addition, I performed a narrative analysis of how these fathers made the decision to stay home. I compared these narratives to look for dominant or typical stories concerning the decision to take on this new role. Through the use of narrative analysis, I looked closely at how these stay-at-home fathers frame their decision and behaviors with regards to staying home (Riessman 1993).

Using the tools mentioned above, interviews with these fathers brought to light some interesting themes regarding their construction of this new stay-at-home role.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter I will discuss how the eight stay-at-home fathers frame their decision to stay home with their children. Furthermore, I will outline the way in which fathers “do gender” through the ways they frame their role as a stay-at-home father, particularly through the division of household labor. Finally, I will discuss how three of the wives of the participants frame their understanding of their family arrangement.

Characteristics

The interviews for this study were conducted between August 2009 and January 2010. All of the stay-at-home fathers are heterosexual, married, white, with six of the eight participants between the ages of 35 and 60 and the other two in their mid-to late twenties. Six of the eight fathers were from upper-middle class families and all had attended some school or training beyond high school. Seven of the eight participants had two children. One participant had one child.

The study participants are listed below by pseudonym, with the following information on each: whether they are currently or previously stay-at-home fathers; current employment status; whether they have a nanny or a housekeeper; how long they have been or were a stay-at-home father, and how many children they have.

Kevin	Previous stay-at-home father, currently working, nanny, housekeeper, five years home, two children
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Brent Currently staying home, currently working part time, no nanny, no housekeeper, three years home, two children

Alan Currently staying home, currently working part time, no nanny, no housekeeper, five years home, two children

Ralph Previously stay-at-home father, currently working, no nanny, no housekeeper, one year home, two children

Gabriel Currently staying home, currently working part time, no nanny, no housekeeper, three years home, two children

Harvey Currently staying home, not working, no nanny, no housekeeper, one year home, one child

Sean Currently staying home, not working, nanny, housekeeper, sixteen years home, two children

Jude Currently staying home, working part time, no nanny, housekeeper, nine years home, two children

Six participants are currently staying home while two participants have returned to work full time. Of those fathers currently staying home, four continue to work part time outside the home. Three fathers have housekeepers and one father also has a part-time nanny.

Part I: Decision

Although several themes emerged from the eight interviews with stay-at-home fathers, overall, two of the most interesting themes that came out of the interviews were in response to a question about the moment of choice. First, all eight fathers' responses to this question focused on the need to stay home in order to benefit their children. While each father had different motivations behind staying home, they all felt that their presence at home was beneficial. Second, respondents also presented their choice as one that was motivated by the value they put on family and their children, as opposed to work. While these fathers felt it was important that someone is home with their children, the decision for the father to stay home was also influenced by economical reasons and not only ideological. Both themes run throughout the fathers' framing of their decision to stay home.

The first theme, benefits for the children, has several threads. First, three of the fathers mentioned that as a couple, they and their wives had decided that they wanted to always have one parent at home. Brent, the father of two young children, who serves at a local restaurant on the weekends, said:

You know, I think kids need a parent around most of the time instead of having someone else raise them. So that's, I think the biggest influence on my decision to stay at home. Just because, one, I like to be home and two, they need, like I said, they need parent interaction. So I think it's really important for their learning, growing up. At least they have a parent who's here constantly. I mean, it's me during the week and Violet on the weekends.

Another father, Jude, faced with either continuing to work forty or more hours a week, putting his children in daycare for the majority of this time, or staying home, said this:

Then my wife and I were trying to decide what to do and we didn't want to, we didn't want to do the thing a lot of people do where they basically drop their kid of somewhere at 7 in the morning and then pick them up at 5 or 6 at night and see them for an hour or two. We didn't want to go that route.

Later in the interview he continued to discuss this theme, comparing his decision with that of some of his friends:

One thing that we've found that works really well with kids and with being parents and the whole thing is, you know, it's just so helpful to have one person that can be flexible. That's me obviously. It has been, and can be, if the kids are sick and they have to you know, stay home from school, I can be there with them.

Or the one that can run around and get things, or meet the repair people at the house or you know, drive things around and that kind of stuff. It's really good to have that one person

Gabriel, another father of two small children, put it simply, "We couldn't both be working full time so that's why I quit my job and spend time with our daughter."

For these three fathers, having a parent at home was a way they feel they can benefit their children. Brent frames his role as vital because for his family, it is important to have a parent home. He mentions that it is "important for their learning" to have "parent interaction." By staying home, he is able to give that to his children. Similarly, Jude frames his decision based on the need to have a parent at home. He lists reasons why it works best for his family to have someone at home; for example "if the kids are sick and they have to stay home from school," he can be there. These three fathers emphasize their presence in the home as beneficial.

Another thread in the "benefit to the children" theme is that of value judgments about the relative importance that these fathers put on family and work. Brent comments on how important he feels it is to have a parent at home rather than "having someone else raise them." For him, he values the time his children spend with their parents and feels that the interaction his kids could have with other adults would be insufficient. Jude also talks about not wanting to leave his kids in daycare. He compares his decision to stay home with those of friends, who work long hours and decided to put their children in daycare:

I don't know how people do it, that are both doing forty, fifty or sixty hours a week of work. You know, we actually have some friends that are doing that. Yeah, couples that are lawyers, both of them. You know, they make tons of money, which is great for them. But they just drop their kids off early and see them late in the day and see them on weekends. It's like, oh man! Yeah, I think so, but it works for them.

While he mentions that it is "great for them," referring to the money they are making, he chooses to stay home with his children. For him, the choice to stay home, even though he does not make the money that the couple he compares with makes, is more important.

Another thread of this theme is based on fathers' desire to be home to experience their children growing up. Five of the eight fathers mentioned that they want to be home to see their children grow and by continuing to work outside the home, they would miss out on the important moments in the lives of their children. By being an integral part of their lives, these fathers feel they are benefiting their children.

Harvey, who recently quit his job in order to spend more time with his young daughter, talked about this as one of the most influential factors in his decision to stay home.

Well, I was working fifty hours a week and going to school twelve to twenty hours a week at the same time. It ended up being almost eighty, or seventy hours

a week of work and school at the same time. I was, I felt like I was missing out on my daughter's life because she was, you know, she was crawling, and I didn't even know she was crawling. She was saying "Dada" and I didn't even know she was saying "Dada." It started wearing on me. I'd come home and be like in tears because I wasn't seeing my daughter growing up. I felt like she barely knew me. When I would be holding her, she would always be wanting my wife so it was very difficult on me. So I stayed with it. Lauren encouraged me to stay with school and work. And as I was getting to the end of it, I was like "Ok you know what? I'm going to put my two week notice in at work. I want to stay home with my daughter and be with her." So, it was a big sacrifice. You know, it was good money. I was making good money but family couldn't beat it.

Throughout his discussion of how he feels toward his decision to stay home, Harvey also talks about the value he puts on his family. For him, it was more important to be home, even if it meant giving up employment. By commenting that he "was making good money but family couldn't beat it," Harvey explicitly talks about the value he puts on his family. He discusses how much money he was making while working and although it was important, he felt that staying home was more beneficial for his family. Both money and family are important to Harvey and his discussion of both illustrates the juxtaposition of these two values. In the end, Harvey's discussion of his decision to stay home highlights the importance he places on family above money. He expresses the

importance he puts on his family through the way he talks about his decision to stay home. Four other respondents also voiced the same theme.

A third thread, based on the benefits to fathers of the decision to stay home, was the ability to play an active role in the development of their children. While describing a typical day with his children, Alan, a stay-at-home father during the day and musician at night, emphasizes his role as the stay-at-home parent and teacher and parent.

I use a large vocabulary with my kids. Um, I point things out. Language is very big to me. So, simple things, let's say we are assembling a train set. They hold up one car and say that's a train. And I say no, this is a locomotive, this is a car, this makes a train. Because they have to learn to think in different sections, you know what I mean and all of this stuff. Because you know, if you say this is a train, you will get general kids. They don't really have, you've got to learn how to think complex wise, if you know what I mean? And a lot of mothers and fathers don't really have, what do you do? Raise the kids. And they don't really have anything to show the kid how to get into something. You know, and have a passion of my own. It's my job to have them go "wow! There's cool things out there and I can do those things or not do them." And the way for me to do, it's fortunate that I have those interests so that my children are pretty imaginative and.... We don't watch TV. Just a little bit in the morning and maybe a little bit at night of like a dancing program or something. But other than that, we don't really have any interest. We're too busy doing stuff.

He feels that by staying home, he is able to teach his daughters in a way that they would not learn in daycare. By being home, he was able to have control over their day to day activities as well as how they learned about the world. Another father, Kevin, said this:

The thing that was very strange was when you tell people you are a stay-at-home dad, the universal response was “good for you.” But they don’t get that it’s not good for me, it’s good for my kids. I only benefit vicariously through good parenting of them. So it had nothing to do with me at all. For me, it was one of the greatest gifts I could give my kids.

On the surface, this respondent is talking about the benefits for his children but on another level he is making value judgments based on what he feels is important. Kevin feels that the best thing he could do for his kids is to stay at home with them in order to manage their environment instead of letting them stay in after school care. For Kevin, he believes that his children benefit from his presence at home rather than staying in after-school care. Similarly, Gabriel, who had spent time working in a day-care and father of two discussed his opposition to sending his children to daycare.

We are trying to keep our children out of daycare. A lot of people who can afford that, you know, take advantage of that. That’s just one of the things that we decided on. It’s just not an option. Since I worked in daycare, there’s no way. No way.

For Gabriel and his wife, it is a better option to have Gabriel at home and to keep the children out of daycare and have more control over the development of their children.

Again, throughout these accounts these fathers share how the values they put on their children influenced how they frame their decision. Through the way Alan, Gabriel, and Kevin present their ideas about why they chose to keep their children out of daycare, they suggest that daycare is insufficient for their children's educational goals. As a stay-at-home parent, these fathers are providing the education for their children.

For the fathers in this study, coming to the decision to stay at home involved several factors. For all men in the study, it was a decision that was made jointly with their wives. Gabriel mentioned "It was kind of a joint decision," and "It was kind of a mutual agreement thing." Similarly, Jude said "We definitely discussed it before I made the decision to stay at home." Also, when discussing their decision to have him stay home, Ralph said "Having just moved, it was a hard time for the kids. We knew it would be a hard time for the kids. We wanted to make sure that they were with someone who could pay attention to them."

These fathers continued to emphasize the benefits their staying home would have on their children. While fathers presented different ways their being in the home would help their children, the overall decision was framed based on their children. Central throughout discussion of this decision were the values fathers place on their family, money, and work.

A narrative analysis of passages from two interviews allows us to examine more deeply how these fathers explain the decision to stay home. Every day, people create accounts of themselves that are “storied,” meaning they explain a situation from their life that includes their opinions and the way they understand the situation (Franzosi 1998, Riessman 1993). The following two stories are examples of these men’s stories of the decision to stay home, giving insight into both the way this decision benefits their children as well as the value these fathers place on family and raising children.

In this first story, Alan, a musician and father of two young daughters, tells how he and his wife came to the conclusion that they would adopt and he would begin staying home with his daughters. The transcript of his story is shown below divided into two columns, the one on the left showing Alan’s telling of the events that constitute the story, and the second on the right showing his feelings toward the events as well as his own insight on what was behind the decision.

Narrative Clauses:

We have two girls that are adopted from China and they are three and five. And I have been doing this for

Descriptive Clauses:

Um, our daily life is, it’s fun. Um, I do this from a little different philosophy. When I raise the girls, well let me identify.

about five years now, well, a little
over five years now.

And I wasn't planning on doing this
at all; never thought I would be
doing this at all. It just threw some
things with life and my parents
passing away and so forth, and kind
of waking up and thinking, my wife
and I had been married for, good
golly, seventeen or eighteen years
we were like wait a minute, there's
more to life than me.

Our daily routine, because we live
on a farm, I'm really cautious about
keeping our pace at a very nice,
relaxing pace but with urgency to
get things done but not this whole
media, click, click, click fastness.
So we tend to, I let them wake
slowly in the morning. We get up
at about quarter to seven, seven in
the morning. We all sort of wake

up at the same time or I wake them
up at 7:30.

Because the kids will be going to
school, pretty soon and so forth, so
they will have a pretty busy
schedule.

So I let them watch a little OPB in
the morning, I let them do a little
reading in the morning. I have a six
year old, she just turned six and a
three and half year old so one can
read and the other one is soaking all
of the stuff in and so forth. So, uh,
we start out kind of, just kind of
waking up and start to get going
and waking up each other and then I
let them watch a little TV
sometimes in the morning and have
just kind of do-nothing time for
about an half hour, maybe an hour.
And then I start chores, my basic
stuff to do um, around the kitchen

and all of that stuff. If it's the summer, then I'm probably out watering the garden, taking care of stuff outside. Got to do the house stuff. Got to do all of it.

Depending on our day, in the summer, we kind of hang out together. Work in the yard, we run errands, go to the store, go to parks, find fountains, particularly in the last hot weather.

It's a fun thing to do.

So our day is kind of, we have a schedule, kind of sort of have nap time. We do nap time between 12 and 2 and if not naps, then quiet time. Definitely lunch between 11:30 and 12:30. So we have some schedule there.

Overall as far as being go, go, go and all of that stuff, there's plenty time for that. Not a lot of drama.

We do pretty good. There's a little drama because we all have our moments. No person to blame so they have fits like all kids do, you just deal with it then and just move on.

In his decision story, Alan spends most of his time describing the events that led up to his decision to stay home as well as recounting how he interacts with his children on a daily basis. Interspersed throughout telling about the details of the decision and his daily life, he talks about the emotions that went into making this decision. As can be seen above, he begins his story emphasizing the enjoyment he has in his daily life. By focusing on the positive at the beginning of his story, he highlights what is important to him. He continues to later discuss the value he puts on his family and the decision to stay home when he says "There was more to life than just me." While most of the story focuses on events that led to the decision and his daily life, he ends his story by emphasizing the positives of being with his children. He mentions that they "do pretty good." The way he discusses this decision suggests not only that he is happy with his new situation but also that he is proud to be staying home with his children. This, again, is an example of the value he puts on his children and his focus on their need for him to be staying home with them.

The second account is by Kevin, who decided to stay home twice, first after the birth of his son and second, when his children were entering school. In the following transcript, Kevin describes the influences in his decisions to stay home.

Narrative Clauses:

At the time, I was an airline pilot
and I was flying twenty days a
month.

I was gone too much and it wasn't
happening. It made me physically
sick that I was not connected to my
kid. So within three months of his
birth I ended up contracting plural
pneumonia and I ended up having
to stay home for three months to
recuperate.

Descriptive Clauses:

There's a certain process that
happens with newborns with where
the children bond to both their
parents. It's a very important
process.

I believe that the illness was

probably a psycho-somatic onset so
that I could be with my kid.

When I finally got that I needed to
heal, I decided that I contributed
that to flying.

So the decision for me was all about
the relationship the first time. Then
I wasn't going to go back to work
until there was something that I
could do that I could be an equal
partner, and have equal parent
responsibility. It's impossible to be
an equal parent and be an airline
pilot.

At the time I was faced with that
decision, most of my peers on the
flight line were also all having
babies.

The ones that were not choosing to
do that were going to fry out.

They were all living in their
domicile and I'd say I saw maybe a

dozen, dozen and a half guys living
in the flop house between
assignments.

So that's where that first decision
came from.

The second time I made the
decision it was when my kids were
getting out of school and they were
9 and 7, 9 and 6.

He was being exposed to some very

They didn't get the choice between
family and flying. So the writing
was very clear to me and what was
important.

And of course, during that process I
realized all of the other things I
wanted to do besides flying so it
was good.

My son was and is very sensitive,
very, I wouldn't say socially inept
but he was definitely malleable, a
little bit too much so.

unwelcome behaviors on the
playground afterschool, in
afterschool care.

Our kids went to private school so
they should have had a little better
supervision than that. But
ultimately it wasn't even about the
school it was about the kids.

Because ultimately you can't really
control what they are being told by
other kids, in an unsupervised
environment.

I didn't realize the extent in which
afterschool care was unsupervised.
And they reacted to it being
unsupervised because there was a
lot of dialogue about that and they
would come home and debrief.

I ultimately realized that the stuff
that they were experiencing was
indicative of a too loosely
supervised environment for me.

They were getting hurt. There was a lot of stuff going on about, um, they were starting to curse. They were starting to talk about shows and programs of things that we wouldn't approve of and let them watch. So we realized that we really needed to take them out of that environment.

Otherwise we would lose them.

And that's where the decision came from.

Kevin made two distinct decisions, at two different times, to stay home. The first of these decisions came after the birth of his first child. In talking about this first decision, Kevin emphasizes his desire to bond with his child. He describes the events that led up to his time at home, including contracting pneumonia. He focuses more on the events that led to the decision rather than on his feelings about the situation. When looking only at the emotional side of the story, Kevin emphasizes the importance of bonding with his child as well as the importance of understanding that family needs to be

a priority. By comparing himself to other pilots who were having children at the same time, he is able to discuss the value he puts on his family and the need for him to stay home. The decision to stay home then is a reflection of how he values his family and ability to bond with his child over flying or money. By comparing himself to other pilots and explicitly saying that they are missing out on what is important, Kevin is making a value judgment as well as suggesting that he did understand what is important in life.

Kevin framed his decision to stay home the second time based on the struggles his children had in afterschool care and his reaction to the situation. The events that led up to this second decision are subsequent to the descriptive side. The story begins with his description of his son as “malleable.” Unlike the first decision, most of the focus in the story is on Kevin’s feelings behind the decision to stay home. Through his discussion, it is clear that he is concerned about the well-being of his children and feels responsible to keep them away from harm. Again, the value Kevin puts on his family is apparent. Also, in this section, it is apparent that his children are exceedingly important and by staying home, his children would benefit greatly. He ends his story by voicing his extreme concern for his children, concluding if he did not make this decision, he could potentially “lose them.” Unlike his first decision, the focus of this story was on how he felt about the events that led to this decision and by staying home, his children would benefit.

Alan and Kevin’s stories are two examples of the stories behind making the life-changing decision to stay home, giving a glimpse into how these fathers understand and process their choice. As is suggested by these two examples, the feelings and life

circumstances were different for each of the eight participants. All eight fathers, however, frame their decision as one made for the betterment of their children.

Part II: “Doing (New) Gender” Roles

When participants were asked how they feel about participating in a role that has traditionally been reserved for women in U.S. society, seven of the eight fathers agree that they loved their role. Brent responded:

I don't think twice about it. It's just my role in our family. So, like I said, I guess it all depends on every family. It's different with every family. This is what we've chosen. This is what I like. This is what we think is best for the kids.

Ralph also mentioned:

I was always pretty proud of it, really. And most people, when they heard what you did, were somewhat, you know they were pretty envious of that schedule.

Both responses were typical of what fathers said, regarding their love for their job in this traditionally feminine role.

This overall satisfaction in this role is reflected in the way fathers construct their role as a job, speak of themselves in comparison to stay-at-home mothers, and view their

household labor duties. Through these avenues, these fathers “do their gender” as they construct this new stay-at-home father role.

The Job

This theme can be divided into two threads. The first is the focus on the “job” of staying at home. Six of the eight fathers describe their role as the stay-at-home parent as a job, “their job” in the family. Alan describes it as “the toughest job” he has ever had. He goes on to say that “everything matters” in this job. Later in the interview, he continues to talk about his job as a stay-at-home father.

Raise the kids. And they don’t really have anything to show the kid how to get into something. You know, and have a passion of my own. It’s my job to have them go “wow! There’s cool things out there and I can do those things or not do them.”

This example is representative of how five of the other fathers describe their role.

Although not in the workforce full time, these fathers continue to maintain the vocabulary they used from their professional lives. By framing their role as a job, these fathers point to the importance of the role.

The second thread present is related to giving up working outside the home. While four fathers continued to work on weekends or occasionally from home, four of the fathers gave up all ties to the workforce. Six of these fathers, including those who

continued ties to outside work, discuss the struggle to “come to grips” with not working full-time. For these men, this meant giving up the idea of being the primary breadwinner, in order to take care of their children.

One father recounts his struggle to understand his feelings around this issue.

Most of the guys I was surrounded with were looking at this stint as being temporary. It never really got to the point where they were accepting that they had done this as a life choice. What I did, and I realized does this mean that I am never going to go back to work again? So that was an issue that really plagued my thoughts a long time. I never understood what that was going to look like for me after I finished doing this. So a lot of my coming to grips with that was letting go of what my concept of going back to work was going to look like without trying to define what it was and ultimately just accepting that the right thing would show up in the right way, at the right time when this part of my life was over. That’s pretty much what happened.

Harvey, father of a one-year old daughter, spoke about his struggle to understand his role in his family and deal with the social pressure of going against the breadwinning role.

At first I felt the pressure. You know, like why is Ashley working? You know you got laid off, you put your two weeks’ notice in to stay at home with your daughter because it’s you know, woman’s work and I’m like, it’s not, you know?

If you think about it, you're spending more time with your daughter, you're getting to know your child, you're getting to know your child a little more and they are getting to know you more. Most of the time when men are at work forty hours plus a week, that's what I think, because that's what my dad is. My dad was in the Air Force and he -- I barely knew my dad when growing up. And I wanted to be there for my daughter.

In this section, Harvey discusses some of his struggles with leaving the workforce. Throughout, he has this dialog with himself, with one side representing the voice of society. Through this dialog, he continues to reaffirm his decision to stay home. At the end, Harvey interrupts himself when talking about his father, beginning by saying "[m]y dad was in the air force" and jumping to "I barely knew my dad . . ." In comparison, he wants his daughter to grow up knowing him.

For these fathers, accepting their role as a stay-at-home father was difficult, but in the end, they were happy to make the change. Based on their discussion, the sacrifices they make are worth it in the end.

In Comparison to Mothers

When asked if there were any differences between what they do as stay-at-home fathers and what stay-at-home mothers traditionally do, there is a mixed response. Two fathers suggest there are no differences in what they do. Sean, a stay-at-home father for over fifteen years said:

You know, I do a lot of the same things that my mom did. So I would anticipate that other mothers are doing things that are like that. You know, I don't necessarily see any differences because I am kind of following, like I said, I am kind of doing what my mom did.

Ralph, who spent a year at home with his children, said "Well I cooked a lot, so in that regard, no. I cleaned so in that regard, no." These fathers suggest that in many ways, what they did as stay-at-home fathers was similar to what is expected of stay-at-home mothers. In contrast, Ralph later suggested there are some differences in his interactions with his children compared to his wife.

Theoretically, I would say yes, I mean, you know long ago, I lost the notion that there are not differences in the way men and women behave. If Wynter was home, it would have been different for Willow. It would have been a mom and a daughter. Right? I think that relationship is a little different. They would probably have shopped. I don't like to shop so except for food, I love food shopping. But you know, they would have gone to the mall. Right? They would have looked at clothes. You know, I can't do that kind of stuff. So yeah, I'm sure there would have been, particularly in the relationship with Mom and Willow, I mean that's a different relationship whether we are working or not. I mean, so it would just be amplified. You know, Willow and I love sports. You know,

Wynter doesn't watch sports so I think a lot of that year, Willow learned a lot about football. You know, she cares about that today, she can watch a football game with the best of them. So yeah, I think that in that way, it's different. So in some ways, yes, and some ways no. I did guy things with her and I took care of the house in the same way that I think that, you know, Mom probably would have. Willow shared some of that with me so I think that, you know I'm not sure if Wynter would have done that. Now I don't know about that in terms of gender issues but I think I have higher expectations that the kids will share in the housework than Wynter does, I think.

Ralph suggests that because his interests differ from his wife's, his interaction with his children was different than if their mother was home. However, he does assert that the way he took care of the home was similar.

Brent, father of a three-year old son and nine-month old daughter, suggests a comparable situation is present in his home.

Well yeah, I mean Violet and I have different ways of doing things. You know, I'm more, I'm just generally a scheduled person. So this time is when I eat, this is the time I, you know they take naps; this is the time that they eat. You know, it's all, but she's, we have differences. I think that I'm more strict than she is sometimes and then she's a lot stricter on other things that I, then you know, I am. So, like for example, when she's napping, if she wakes up in the middle of her

nap, you know she'll start fussing. I just leave her in there. You know, not for long periods of time. Not if she's wailing, you know. You know, the death scream. But Violet will listen for so long and then she'll go in there. So that's one thing that. So just little things.

Brent asserts that there are "little things" that are different in the way he and his wife take care of the children. While both men present differences between the ways they interact within the home, these differences seem to be accepted. Sean, who does not perceive any differences as well as Brent and Ralph, suggest that they feel accepted in their role as a stay-at-home father.

In comparison, four fathers describe their interactions with stay-at-home mothers. Throughout their comparison, these fathers suggested that their parenting is as good if not better than the stay-at-home mothers they compare themselves to. In the following two passages, tone is important to note and the emphasis is italicized. Alan, the father of two adopted daughters described his feelings toward stay-at-home mothers.

[On the] gals' side, you know you *girls get groups* and yeah, it's quite isolating. Because women don't, you know, *who's that guy over there with the kids and what does he know?*

Later in the interview, when asked about breaking into the "mom's circle," he continued.

They have their *little cliques* and talk about what they want to talk about and *I want to talk about raising kids*. And a lot of them don't want to talk about that. But you know, I have my philosophy and like to stick to it. So yeah, it's pretty isolating and sometimes I feel like I am in over my head. You know, that's why you make it up every day. But you know, you trust your gut.

Alan emphasizes the "little cliques" of some stay-at-home mothers, suggesting that their focus is not on their children. By saying he does focus on his children, he suggests that he understands how to fulfill the role of a stay-at-home parent, perhaps better than the "little cliques" of stay-at-home mothers. While he mentions that he "feels over [his] head" in this section, throughout the interview, he portrays confidence in his ability to fulfill this role.

Another father, Kevin, also compares himself to other stay-at-home mothers while volunteering at his children's school.

I realized that what *I* did, *I did for their betterment*, without *my own benefit*, without any justification outwardly, and then I was okay with being around *cackles* of stay-at-home chatty moms that, you know, are *overly* emotional about the small stuff. It was never, *for me*, it never became about trying to find *commonality* with them.

When reading this quotation with the emphasis, the tone is disparaging towards mothers. By contrasting themselves with these mothers, both fathers suggest that the failings of the mothers are not shared by stay-at-home fathers.

For those fathers who did experience some negative reactions to their choice, it was a feeling that society forgot that they were the primary caregiver. Family members, doctors, and friends tend to forget that they were the ones taking care of the children and instead would refer to the mother when asking about the children. Gabriel talked about his experience with other career fathers.

I think that there are aspects of home life that a lot of people don't see. 'Cause I know that like my brother-in-law do the volunteer with church and he asks me to do stuff all the time and it's kind of like weird. 'Cause his wife is a stay-at-home mom, and he doesn't think about, like you come and do this. Well if my wife is working, then I have to figure out what to do with Allie so it's like, you know. It's kind of that, oh, you don't think that, you know if you're a prominent person, you work, work, work. You don't think, you know, about the kids as much, type of thing.

Similarly, Sean experienced confusing when speaking to the pediatrician.

I mean sometimes I happen to catch, I mean for example the pediatrician forgets that you're the primary caregiver. So he'll say well, let the mom know do this or

let Mom know that when in fact it has to do with me. But you know, it's never really ever given me any kind of slight, it's just part of it.

Both Brent and Sean present this issue as something that can cause some awkwardness, but did not express strongly negative feelings about others forgetting the responsibilities they have as stay-at-home fathers.

When discussing his experience in the park with his children, Alan reflects on the reactions from others.

You know, a lot of people immediately assume that you're divorced when you are not there with your wife. So there's a lot of, you know, "oh it's nice of you to take the kids out." So that was a little strange. It's almost like divorce is more accepted in society than stay-at-home dads that actually do that. So I thought that was a little interesting too. But you know, as time went on, it went away. As I became comfortable and paying less attention in my mind about what other people think and not caring, it stopped.

Like Brent and Sean, Alan does not express negative feelings toward the awkwardness he experienced, although he comments on how others accept him in the role of stay-at-home parent. All three fathers experienced times when others forgot they were or assumed they were not the stay-at-home parent, but based on their discussions of the situations, they did not feel particularly challenged.

From whatever point of view, all eight fathers compare their role as a stay-at-home parent to mothers, who traditionally take on this role. By using mothers as a measuring tool, these fathers continue to reevaluate this role for themselves.

Division of Household Labor

Originally, I assumed one of the biggest issues for these stay-at-home fathers would be the struggle with the division of household labor. Based on interviews with both the fathers as well as with some of their wives, however, household labor was not presented as a struggle or issue.

One theme that came through in interviews was the sense of looking at household labor as a job. Just as fathers referred to taking care of the children as a job, they used similar language to describe their time spent on household labor. For Brent, creating a schedule was important in keeping the household work going. When asked what his week was like, he describes the following.

Um, well it depends really on what day because like, Mondays are shopping days. So that day is kind of shot because everybody's behind schedule. So I don't usually do anything because I'm tired from working all weekend. Um, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, maybe an hour or two. Every night, you know, I load the dishwasher so that's ran. I do laundry pretty much every day but you can't really time that sort of thing. So it's just randomly through the day.

Later in the interview, when asked about how he felt about the division of household labor in his home he answered:

I wouldn't say that they are really divided because Violet's not home. You know, she's the one who's working, so I mean there's really no need to divide them. I mean when she's home during the weekends, she loads dishes and vacuums and does things but you know, does wash, but it's not her job. So it's my job. So I wouldn't say that they are divided. She does things, but you know it's not divided. That's just my responsibility when I stay home. You know, that's the benefits of, if you want to call it that, of staying home. So you know, besides taking care of them, I'm free to eat when I want, do what I want, so yeah, that's what you get.

Similarly, Ralph said this when asked about the division of household labor in his home:

Oh golly, I do all of it that I can. You know, my wife does do the check book better than me; I still use my fingers to add. Um, other than that, we come from an equal opportunity home. She's working her butt off. She works in IT and does some laundry, her laundry. Nothing worse than me getting her stuff in the dryer. But overall, I try to do it all because it's my job.

For this family, it was about negotiating time outside the home at the workplace and the labor within the home. Similarly, for Brent's family, household labor is divided based on who is home at the time. In both accounts, the division of household labor is not

presented as an issue within the family, but something that these men take on when needed.

Housework is viewed as a job. It is also something that is negotiated within their relationship with their wives. These fathers acknowledge that while they are doing perhaps more housework now as stay-at-home parents than when they worked outside of the home, there is still a sense of negotiation that happens between them and their wives. No participant stated that they did all of the housework; instead, they took care of certain aspects of the housework, leaving the rest for their wives and or in some cases for a housecleaner. Still, they took over the day to day activities to “keep the house running.” Lucy, Kevin’s wife, said:

As time passed he took on more ownership for day to day housework: laundry, dry cleaning, managing the housecleaners, setting up parent teacher conferences, feeding the kids dinner (but Kevin does not cook, he takes them out), getting them up in the morning and dressed, taking the kids to the doctor.

Although they have housecleaners and he does not cook, he did take over the day-to-day activities needed to make sure everything was working right. Similarly, Sean’s wife Anna, who works up to 70 or 80 hours a week, said this:

We have an amazing division of labor in our home. Sean really manages the household, so he does grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, cleaning (well, a little-

we have a housekeeper twice a month which has been a marriage saver!) He runs errands (picks up dry-cleaning), manages kids' school projects, volunteers for fieldtrips etc. On weekends, I clean, cook, do laundry and grocery shop. During the week because of my work schedule and travel (70 to 80 hours per week), he is on point for keeping things moving.

Both wives suggest that while they continue to do some work within the home; their husbands have taken over the day-to-day activities.

When asked how they feel about their family/work situation, all three wives felt like their arrangement was the best situation for their family. Lucy said, "Having Kevin stay home has been a gift for each of us." Jane, when talking about their arrangement in the future, said:

Brent does not want to work a full time job, and I don't want him to either. I love having him at home. Even after the kids go to school and get more independent I hope Brent can just work part-time doing something he loves like personal training. Then he would continue to do the household duties. I think Brent actually enjoys a lot of what he does.

Similarly, Anna had this to say about Sean staying home:

For our family, this arrangement has been a gift, both to me and to our children. Some men may struggle with the stay-at-home role, but Sean has flourished. He has developed a network of good friends and seeks regular interaction outside the home/kid environment. With respect to our school environment, he is equally at home with the moms or the dads and I get regular feedback on what a great job he's doing at home from my friends at school and our principal! Bottom line-- I couldn't focus on my career without him at home and feel blessed to have this stay-at-home arrangement. While there are days when I would definitely like to trade (working mother guilt never goes away . . . always feel like you should be where you are not . . . work or home), this deal works for us. The key to success is communication, managing expectations, providing outside support (babysitter, time away from kids etc), a housekeeper at least twice a month and commitment to creating the right environment for our kids.

Both wives had only positive things to say about their situation and the division of household labor within their family. With their husbands home full time, they are able to work outside the home without the worry of childcare. For Anna, she feels she “couldn’t focus on [her] career without [Sean] at home.” Knowing their children are taken care of, gives these women the freedom to focus on their career.

Four families in this study are able to afford housecleaning or even nannies in order to help with the housework or children. For Jude, Kevin and Sean, this was the case. As Sean’s wife, Anna mentioned:

Sean probably mentioned that we also have had a nanny as part of our family for 9 years. While her hours are absolutely minimal at this point, having that outlet for Sean was critical, especially when we had 3 very young children. She has also become an extended member of our family.

By having the extra help, these fathers were able to have time to themselves or help that allowed them the freedom to interact outside the home. Of the four fathers who did not have the extra help, three continued to work outside of the home. For Gabriel, his social time is spent at work: “My social group is usually people here at Starbucks.” Overall, no matter what the division of household tasks looks like, the situation works for each family. While the division of household tasks is different for each family, respondents did not seem to struggle with taken over where needed.

Another interesting aspect to the division of household labor is the kin work, defined by anthropologist Micaela Di Leonardo (1987) as “the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin.” In order to understand if these men were taking on the responsibility of kin work, participants were asked who in their family would be responsible for sending invitations for a party the family was throwing. Of the eight fathers, only two said that this type of kin work is their responsibility. This is another indicator of gender issues within these families.

In summary, fathers frame their role as stay-at-home parents as a job. By labeling their role as a job, these fathers are able to continue to validate their role as being important. Fathers also validate their role through comparison with stay-at-home mothers. Through this comparison, they assert that they are fulfilling their role as well as or better than the stay-at-home parent standard. Finally, the division of household labor is spoken of as a measure of their role fulfillment. By taking on the majority of the household labor, these fathers show that they are properly fulfilling the stay-at-home parent role.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

At the start of this research, I asked two questions: How do stay-at-home fathers understand their masculinity and social role? How is talk about the negotiation of household labor in stay-at-home father/career mother families an illustration of masculine issues? I chose to explore these questions through discussions with eight stay-at-home fathers.

In asking the first main research question, I thought challenging hegemonic masculinity would be a salient issue that participants would discuss in great detail. After talking with these fathers, I found that struggles against hegemonic masculinity are either not as strong as I anticipated or not an issue these fathers were willing to discuss within the context of an interview.

To understand how participants perceive their roles as stay-at-home parents and how that relates to their feelings of masculinity, I asked two specific interview questions. The first question focused on fathers' feelings about being in a role that is traditionally feminine. All eight fathers mentioned that they enjoyed or even loved being in their current position. In response to this question, instead of openly discussing masculinity, fathers spoke of other issues that were a reflection of the struggles they felt toward hegemonic masculinity. For example, recurrent themes included the view of their time at home as a job and the emphasis on their ability as a primary caregiver, comparing themselves to mothers. Through their use of vocabulary that refers to work, a world in which masculinity comfortably resides, these fathers continue to express their

masculinity in similar ways to those who still work outside the home. By doing this, these fathers are showing that their role as a stay-at-home parent is not feminine, rather a new role constructed for men. Fathers expressed pride in what they were doing and thought that they could do the job just as well, if not better, than stay-at-home mothers. While these fathers struggle with figuring out this new role as well as the reactions from others, they do not express intense stress toward their counter-masculine role. Instead, they are willing to take up the role and put it into the context of their understanding of masculinity.

The second main research question I asked focused on how these families negotiate the division of household labor. More specifically, I was interested in understanding whether men who took on the primary care-giving role would also take on the majority of the housework. In these eight interviews with stay-at-home fathers and three interviews with their career wives, household labor is not presented as a struggle to the extent I would have expected. Each family negotiated this division differently in a way that works well for them. To make things work, Kevin's and Sean's families employed housekeepers and, at times, a nanny, to help alleviate some of the burden of the household chores. In their households, their partners were also responsible for some of the household tasks, such as laundry or cooking. Other families, like Gabriel's and Jude's, the responsibilities were shared more equally with the breadwinning partner. While Gabriel and Jude were responsible for more of the housework at times, the work is split equally with their partner. In comparison, in families like Brent's, Harvey's, and Ralph's, the majority, if not all, of the household labor became the responsibility of the

stay-at-home father. Each family negotiated the responsibilities of the house differently, depending on their situation.

Overall, the negotiation of the division of household labor was not presented as a reflection of gender roles or norms. Throughout the discussion of household labor, gender roles were not suggested as the reason for taking on or rejecting certain household tasks. When Kevin talked about his roles within the home, for instance, he made it clear that he was not responsible for cooking. In fact, he despised cooking, so when he was responsible for dinner, which was the case almost every night, they went out to eat. While this could be a way for him to reject what is traditionally a woman's role, it could also be solely because he hates this particular task. In comparison, Brent described how much he enjoys being in charge of running the house, cooking included. Among these eight men, we do not see Hochschild's "stalled revolution." Instead, as needed, these men are willing to do the laundry or pick up a broom. However, this does not suggest the "stalled revolution" is over for all men. Women continue to do the majority of the household labor. Currently, men are being laid off at a higher rate than women, possibly causing a shift in the division of household labor but with differences in pay between women and men staying constant, this change may be slow. Within the individual homes, these stay-at-home fathers are willing to help where needed, however, throughout society, the "stalled revolution" persists.

It is impossible to say that traditional gender roles or ideas of hegemonic masculinity did not have any influence on how these men understand their role as a stay-at-home parent and how they negotiated the division of household labor within their

home. However, it was not as evident as I would have expected. For the most part, the men in this study have taken on their non-traditional role in order to benefit their children. The structure of this new role, for them, goes beyond gender roles but is a reflection of their core beliefs toward the importance of family and their children. It was discussion of why these eight fathers are staying home that allowed for some of the richest and emotional material to be expressed. In formation of this stay-at-home father identity, the moment of decision is value laden. As they invent the role, they are inventing a value structure with it, based on the benefit of the children. They are structuring this role around the idea of being “good” stay-at-home parents. Overwhelmingly, these fathers chose to stay home because they felt they had a moral obligation, as parents, to their children. It is important to these eight fathers that a parent is home with their children during the day. Also, having a parent in control of their children’s education and day-to-day activities is essential. Because all eight fathers belong to the middle class, they are prone to seeing their position as parents as an intensive job. While working class families tend to allow for “natural growth,” middle class families are prone to seeing their role as more of an intensive job and engage in a process of “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003). Because of their social class, participants are more likely to emphasize the need for their involvement in their children’s activities. The way these fathers talked about the reasons for choosing to stay home is a reflection of the importance they put on the stay-at-home parent role. The values they find imperative lead them to reconstruct that role to specifically include fathers.

In this way, these fathers continue to exhibit masculine traits within this traditionally feminine role. While they continue to “do gender” by relating their experiences based on hegemonic masculinity ideals (referring to their role as a job, focusing on their competency in the role), the structure of the role is different from that of the stay-at-home mother. Instead of changing aspects of their masculinities, these fathers continue to do their gender within this newly constructed role of a stay-at-home father.

Limitations

As with any study focusing on a small number of in-depth interviews, it is impossible to capture the entire story for a wide population, such as all stay-at-home fathers. Instead, the intent is to tell the stories of the stay-at-home fathers interviewed and how their experiences have influenced the division of household labor in their homes.

The characteristics of the participants also affect the extent to which the results are transferable. Seven of the eight participants in this study are residents of Portland or Salem, Oregon. Portland tends to be considered a family-friendly city with a high tolerance for diversity in family type. This study’s transferability might only extend to other areas of the country where such social and political views are common. Finally, due to snowball sampling, the participants in this study are all white and middle class, also limiting transferability.

Because all eight participants belong to the middle class, their reactions to staying home may be different than those who belong to the working class. Because these families are not struggling financially, there may be less pressure on these men to fulfill

the breadwinner role. In addition, these men have had careers and left them to stay home. They made the choice to stay home rather than being laid off.

In addition, my own biases and characteristics may have an impact on how participants respond and interact in the interviews. Because I am a woman without children, some fathers may not have felt as comfortable speaking with me as they would have with someone who had some parenting experiences.

Future Research

As with most studies focusing on a limited number of participants, the goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of the stories of these eight men and their role as stay-at-home parents. Future research could focus on a larger group of fathers in order to gain a broader understanding of their feelings and of how the division of labor is played out in a variety of families. Because this research was done in an area that is becoming accustomed to stay-at-home fathers, it would be interesting to understand how fathers feel in a community where men are perhaps judged more harshly for not participating in the workforce.

A larger study, perhaps using a combination of quantitative surveys as well as in-depth interviews, would shed a better light on the phenomena of stay-at-home fathers. A mixed method approach would allow for a broader understanding of the stay-at-home father population through survey data, while interviews would still allow for an in-depth look at their experiences. Further research would also allow us to see how gender norms or expectations are changing within society as well as how we define masculinity.

In addition, further research into the use of vocabulary that continues to relate to the outside workforce after the individual has left would be interesting and a useful tool at understanding gender issues. Men in this study continued to use this vocabulary but this may not solely be an indicator of masculine issues. Women who give up careers to stay home may use similar vocabulary. Further research could help understand if this talk is related to gender issues or a reflection of working outside the home.

Conclusion

Each of these eight fathers is faced with the challenge of creating a new role as a stay-at-home father, while going against traditional masculine gender roles. Despite this, every father in this study overwhelmingly expressed their happiness and pride in being able to stay home. Each father seemed to share Harvey's sentiment:

I just think that dads shouldn't be afraid to stay at home to be with their child because it's very rewarding to see them growing up and saying things like "Dada" and because I missed my daughter's first words and crawling. Now I wish I could have stayed home and hadn't missed seeing that and been there for her. Now, I kind of feel like I am making up for it. So I guess my main thing is don't be ashamed to stay at home and be a stay-at-home father because it's the best thing in the world.

As reflected in the quote, these men made the choice to challenge traditional masculine roles and their stories suggest they are thriving within their new identities as stay-at-home fathers.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Stay-at-home Fathers:

Daily Life and the Decision

- 1) How would you describe your primary occupation?
- 2) Tell me a little bit about your daily life
- 3) What influenced your decision to stay at home and become the primary care giver?
- 4) How do you feel about this decision?
- 5) What have been some of the difficulties you have faced as a stay at home parent?
- 6) Do you socialize with other stay at home parents?
- 7) What kind of community or out of the home activities are you involved in, if any?

Division of Household Labor

- 8) What would you say some of your primary responsibilities within the home are?
- 9) How is household work or chores divided between you and your spouse?
- 10) Can you give an estimate about how much time you spend on household chores?
How much your spouse spends on household chores? Is this an issue in your relationship?

Reflections

- 11) Do you think you will continue as a stay-at-home father in the future? How long?

12) Do you plan on returning to the workforce?

13) While there are many stay-at-home mothers, there are much fewer stay-at-home fathers. How do you feel about that? Do you think there are any differences?

14) How do you feel being in a role that is considered non-traditional for men?

Career Mothers

1) How is household work or chores divided between you and your spouse?

2) Can you give an estimate about how much time you spend on household chores? How much your spouse spends on household chores? Is this an issue in your relationship?

3) Do you think you will continue this arrangement in the future? How long?

4) While there are many stay-at-home mothers, there are much fewer stay-at-home fathers. How do you feel about that? Do you think there are any differences?