

Constructing Masculinities and the Role of Stay-At-Home Fathers:
Discussions of Isolation, Resistance and the Division of Household Labor

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines how fathers, who stay home with their children and identify as the main care-giver within their family, construct their role as the primary caregiver. I analyze the narratives of stay-at-home fathers focusing on the thematic areas of isolation, resistance and the division of household labor. Unlike previous research, I examine the ways in which fathers construct their position as a stay-at-home father separate from the traditional stay-at-home mother role. Consequently, I focus on the constructions of masculinities by stay-at-home fathers that allows for the construction of the stay-at-home role to be uniquely tied to fatherhood rather than motherhood.

In this research, I explore three questions: 1) how do stay-at-home fathers construct their masculinity, specifically in relation to their social roles as fathers, partners, peers, etc.? 2) Is the negotiation of household labor, including care work and household tasks, in these families a reflection of shifting gender roles in the home where the primary caregiver is the father? 3) In what ways does social location and intersecting identities influence the ways in which fathers construct this stay-at-home identity?

My research emphasizes how these fathers understand their role as a stay-at-home father while challenging some traditionally dominant expectations of fatherhood. Specifically, I use themes of isolation, resistance, and the division of household labor in order to understand the multiple ways fathers experience their roles as stay-at-home parents.

DEDICATION

For the strongest woman I know, my mother. You are my inspiration now and forever.

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INTRODUCTION

My dad was many things and he did lots of stuff with us but I feel like my kids can approach me and talk about stuff that we couldn't. Part of that is his personality was just very controlling. Having him help me out with the kids as they have gone through the different years, I think especially with the last two, he's so much more relaxed.

Really, with the first ones, I was like, "Wow, I missed so much when I was working." With my oldest, you know, her first four years, I was working. Yeah, I saw a lot but nothing like I do now with my last three or four kids where I was basically at home their entire lives. I love seeing that they're not ashamed about staying with an at-home dad. A lot of their friends – our house is where a lot of them come to hang out. I love that. And I don't know that would happen if I wasn't at home. I suppose if we were both working, definitely not. I love that the kids don't often want to go hang out with other kids, they just want to be at home.

When asked what is important about being a stay-at-home father, Liam, a stay-at-home father for the past 15 years to six children responds with the above quote. As he talks about his father and then about himself, he compares himself to the traditional father role his own dad embodied while Liam was growing up. Through this and talking about his home life, not only does he reveal how proud he is of his role in his children's lives, he suggests that their lives would be different if he were working outside the home.

This is one of many conversations I participated in with stay-at-home fathers over a two day period at the national stay-at-home father convention. As Liam and I talk in the foyer of the hotel, the noise level suddenly increases as over 100 fathers empty out of the second session of the day. Men from all over the country have left their partners and children at home to get together for a two day convention for stay-at-home fathers. Here, they talk about their roles as parents, their struggles as stay-at-home fathers, and their changing sense of masculinities. During the breakout sessions, classes on cooking,

parenting, organizing stay-at-home father groups and even blogging are available to these fathers.

While still in the minority, these fathers are part of a growing group of men who are leaving outside, paid work to stay home with their children. Since the 2002 Current Population Survey, where the number of stay-at-home fathers was estimated to be around 105,000 (Fields 2003), the number of stay-at-home fathers has increased to 189,000 in 2012 (U.S. Census). In these studies, stay-at-home fathers were defined as fathers who are home to care for their children under age 15 while their wives worked outside the home (U.S. Census 2012). In addition, the proportion of stay-at-home fathers has increased from 2.0% between 1976 and 1979 to 3.5% between 2000 and 2009 (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015). While these numbers represent a relatively restrictive definition, other research suggests that the number of stay-at-home fathers is much larger. A recent report by the Pew Research Center suggests that there are closer to two million stay-at-home fathers in the United States (2014). By including any father of a child younger than 18 who does not work for pay, regardless of the reason, this report suggests that there are many more fathers who are stay-at-home dads than is accounted for by the U.S. Census. Still other research suggests that the definitions currently being used are too restrictive when measuring the number of stay-at-home fathers. Latshaw (2011) suggests that fathers who do not fit within the definition used by the U.S. Census are not being counted as stay-at-home fathers even if they identify as such. By not counting single, divorced, gay or cohabitating fathers as stay-at-home fathers, the number of stay-at-home fathers may be much higher. In addition, stay-at-home fathers may hold part-time jobs

outside the home but continue to identify as stay-at-home fathers. However, they are not counted by the U.S. Census.

This project focuses on how fathers who are the main care-givers for their children while their partners work outside the home create their own definitions of what it means to be a stay-at-home father. Through interviews with 40 fathers, this project highlights how fathers create the identity of a stay-at-home father and their experiences in this role as fathers and men.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Important to the theoretical framing of this project are the multiple ways in which gender is continually constructed by individuals through interactions with others and society. These ongoing constructions of gender shape the ways in which masculinities, fatherhood, and the division of household labor are understood and negotiated by stay-at-home fathers. Using gender constructionism to understand how these concepts are created allows me to examine how stay-at-home fathers construct their own identities as fathers and men in a dynamic and ever emergent way.

Gender Constructionism

Stay-at-home fathers construct their identities through the multiple ways masculinities have been socially created within the United States. Our understanding of the social construction of masculinities has been heavily influenced by West and Zimmerman's "Doing Gender," (1987). Gender is constructed through the daily interactions with other individuals and in the context of culture and society rather than an

essential or biological difference based on sex. Specifically, West and Zimmerman assert “that a person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but more fundamentally, it is something one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others,” (140). Gender is not an essential characteristic associated with being male or female; rather it is constructed through a constant “doing” of gender. In this way, masculinities are constructed through individuals’ interactions with each other as well as media and society within a particular historical time and place (Connell 2000). Masculinities then, are not static identities associated with only males, but a gender construct and ongoing process that is constantly reinforced through societal interaction. Therefore, within this study, hegemonic masculinities are a useful framework for understanding the complexities of the social constructs that stay-at-home fathers use in establishing their identities as men, fathers, and stay-at-home parents.

Hegemonic Masculinities

Important to the discussion of stay-at-home fathers is the construction of hegemonic masculinities. Connell (1995) states that hegemonic masculinities are “defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women,” (77). Hegemonic masculinities are the ideal forms of masculinities that establish men’s dominant role within the patriarchal society of the United States. It is not a static position or ideal; rather it is based on current constructions of gender that continue to perpetuate patriarchy and therefore the position of power for some men (Connell and Messerschmidt

2005). It is important to note that these constructions of gender and gender practices are subject to change, creating new understandings of the ideal forms of masculinities. Therefore, hegemonic masculinities are relational, constructed not only at structural levels but through friendships and relationships with other men and women (Greif 2009). In addition, hegemonic masculinities are also constructed in opposition and in relation to other masculinities and femininities (Connell 1995).

Hegemonic masculinities, while the dominant and ideal forms of masculinities, are available to only a few men able to approximate it (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Stay-at-home fathers, as well as most men, are unable to participate fully in all of the characteristics or requirements of hegemonic masculinities. They react to this in three ways: first, some men choose to change aspects of their life in order to conform to hegemonic masculinities. Second, some men choose to conform to hegemonic masculinities in some ways while rejecting it in other areas of their life. Finally, some men reject notions of hegemonic masculinities altogether but may continue to benefit from the privileges of patriarchy (Connell 1995). Rarely do men fall under only one of the above categories; rather men's relationship to hegemonic masculinities are in constant negotiation.

In addition to subordinated masculinities, hegemonic masculinities are also constructed in relation to femininities. Specifically, all femininities are constructed as subordinate to all masculinities; therefore, according to Connell (1987) there is not a parallel version of hegemonic masculinity within femininity. Femininities are important to this study because many times masculinities are subordinated based on their feminine characteristics. The use of terms, such as sissy, which tends to be used in a derogatory

manner associated with feminine characteristics, can be used to put men in a subordinate position, even when used as a typology of different types of masculinities (Heasley 2005). For stay-at-home fathers, the construction of masculinities in comparison to femininities is important because in many ways, these fathers are compared to women as they take on a traditionally feminine role.

For this project, hegemonic masculinities are a useful framework to understand masculinities at both structural and individual levels for stay-at-home fathers. At a structural level, hegemonic masculinities are useful in understanding the messages and pressures some stay-at-home fathers face based on their role at home. Specifically, the cultural images of being a “man” are used by these stay-at-home fathers to either reject, accept or simultaneously do both as they understand their own masculinity. For men who do not conform to these expectations, there may be social consequences in the form of isolation, negative reactions from family and friends, as well as not being counted as a stay-at-home parent by the government, schools, or doctor’s office (Smith 2009). On an individual level, hegemonic masculinities are a useful as a framework to understand the ways in which fathers are or are not struggling with pressures associated with hegemonic masculinities. Some fathers define their own masculinity in reference to aspects of hegemonic masculinities while others reject it altogether. Both constructions of masculinities are important to this research.

Intersectionality is a central aspect of hegemonic masculinities. Specifically, it is useful in discussing intersecting identities while acknowledging that very few are able to fully live up to these ideal expectations of masculinities (Messerschmidt 2012). Different identities and social positions, in some cases, allow for some men to participate in

hegemonic masculinities, while for the majority, these intersecting identities restrict men's ability to fully enact aspects of hegemonic masculinities. This framework is useful in understanding the ways in which intersecting identities like race, class and sexual orientation influence how participants construct their own masculinities (Brod and Kaufman 1994, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Within the context of race, Connell (1995) uses marginalized masculinities to refer to men who are marginalized within society based on their race or ethnicity. In the United States, men of color tend to have less access to the benefits and privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity (Collins 2004, hooks 2004, Lemelle 2009). Sexual orientation and class are also influence access to power associated with hegemonic masculinities. Sexual orientation is regulated both politically and culturally as well as through violence, privileging heterosexual men (Connell 1995, Chauncey 1994). Finally, class and access to wealth give men the economic power to participate in aspects of traditional expectations of masculinities. Overall, hegemonic masculinities as a framework is useful for highlighting intersecting identities and how these ongoing constructions of difference impact access to participate in dominant forms of masculinities.

It is important to also de-center hegemonic masculinities within this research. While it is important to understand and acknowledge hegemonic masculinities, I do not continue to re-affirm and center it within my research. I do this by acknowledging these gender practices that affirm men's dominance without using hegemonic masculinities as the standards by which I measure the participants against. Rather, I am interested in the continual construction of masculinities within their own lives as well as their construction of their identities as stay-at-home fathers. In addition, I am interested in how aspects of

traditional expectations of masculinities influence how participants view themselves and others. By using hegemonic masculinities as a framework to understand masculinities, specifically in the context of stay-at-home fathers, I acknowledge both the structural and individual influences on these men's lives without reproducing the dominance of hegemonic masculinities within my own research.

Fatherhood and Caregiving

Also important to the discussion of stay-at-home fathers is the construction of fatherhood within the United States and the ways participants continue to construct fatherhood in their own lives as stay-at-home fathers. Normative concepts of fatherhood within the United States are defined in relation to motherhood and the family (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2004). Traditionally, fathers are expected to be breadwinners, working outside the home, leaving the care-giving and daily running of the household to mothers. In recent years, reactions to the feminist movement and men's movements focusing on fatherhood and men's rights have changed some of the expectations for fathers in the United States (Crowley 2008). In many ways, this new construction of fatherhood continues to value the same characteristics of traditional fatherhood. Fathers are expected to play a more active role in the household and the care for children while still expected to provide for the family, with the income of their female partners seen as an addition, regardless of her income level (Bolak 1997, Dillaway and Paré 2008, Harrington et. al 2010). Fathers' involvement goes beyond just the marriage and breadwinning to also include focusing on the personal relationships with their children (Marsiglio and Roy 2012). These images and expectations of fathers are not always

consistent across class, race or location, however they are cultural images associated with fatherhood in the United States. In this context, stay-at-home fathers are of particular interest. By giving up their role as a provider for the family, stay-at-home fathers may be contributing to the changing construction of fatherhood. In addition, by taking on a traditionally feminine role as the stay-at-home parent, they are blurring the lines between normative expectations of motherhood and fatherhood.

Participating in breadwinning as well as being involved in the care-giving of children and the division of household labor creates tensions and changes in the ways that fatherhood is defined within the family (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie and Robinson 2012; Gerson 2010). While fathers continue to maintain the provider role, there is also desire to be emotionally involved with the family and share an equal division of child care between themselves and their partner (McGill 2014). However, few fathers consider staying home fulltime with their children (Clawson and Gerstel 2014). Rarely must fathers negotiate taking parental leave or re-entering the workplace after the birth of a child, nor are they faced with negative messages about returning to work too soon or not early enough like many women experience (Harrington, Van Deusen and Ladge 2010, Harrington, Van Deusen and Humberd 2011). Fathers' involvement in the home may be stronger than in the past, but the consequences that mothers encounter are not greatly felt by fathers.

Tension also surrounds the time devoted by fathers to the care of the children and household. Much research has been devoted to the division of household labor (Forste and Fox 2012, Hook 2006) but little research focuses specifically on the amount of time fathers spend caring for their children. Raley, Bianchi and Wang (2012) use time diary

data to highlight the time gap spent caring for children between mothers and fathers. When compared to stay-at-home mothers, stay-at-home fathers spend less time caregiving. Specifically, fathers tend to spend more time on fun activities such as playing than mothers. In addition, fathers tend to spend less time caring for their children in isolation than mothers (Lyn 2006, Bianchi 2000). While new expectations for fathers around time spent as an equal partner within the home and care-giving may be prevalent in U.S. culture, their actions within the home may not match up with the cultural expectations around involved fathering (Wall and Arnold 2007).

Differing from fathers, normative definitions of motherhood focus on the role of women in the home. Specifically, mothers who work within or outside the home are confronted with the expectations of intensive motherhood (Christopher 2012). Intensive mothering is a dominant concept of mothering in the United States that includes “mandates for dedicated one-on-one mother time, careful choice of correct ‘alternative mothers,’ the expression of powerful, sacrificial love for children and a focus on children’s desires and developmental needs guided by experts and financial resources,” (Medved 2009:144). Tensions arise when mothers choose, by desire or necessity, to work outside the home because as a result, they may be unable to meet all of the requirements needed to be considered “good” mothers (Hayes 1998). Those who choose to stay home to take care of their children but are unable to support themselves without governmental assistance are seen as lazy and unfit (Dillaway and Paré 2008). More research focusing on access to motherhood based on intersecting identities such as class and race are helpful in understanding who has access and cares about normative definitions of motherhood and who is left out. Overall, while many women work outside

the home, they are continually seen as more nurturing and fit for child care than fathers (Bridges et. al 2002). While concepts of both fatherhood and motherhood are changing, tensions continue to exist around the proper roles for men and women within the family structure.

In this context, stay-at-home fathers must construct their roles as fathers in different ways that are not associated with earning income for the family. However, some of the tensions surrounding the division of household labor and care-giving are still be prevalent. Whether this means rejecting breadwinning as a tenet of involved fathering or changing what it means to provide for the family, stay-at-home fathers are faced with continually constructing fatherhood and how they understand themselves as men in relation to their role as a stay-at-home parent.

Household Labor

One of the central gendered negotiations for both fathers and mothers is the division of household labor. Within the context of stay-at-home fathers, household labor is an important topic for discussions of the construction of both the stay-at-home father role and masculinities. While fathering also includes taking on more responsibilities within the home, women continue to do the majority of household labor in the context of heterosexual relationships (Coltrane 2000, Lyn 2006, Braun et. al 2008, Kroska 2004, Lam et al. 2012). In the past twenty years, there has been a decrease in the time women spend on household labor and an increase in the time men spend on household labor. However, women continue to spend more time than men doing household tasks (Kuehhirt 2012). This is the case except when women out-earn their male partners (Killewald and

Gough 2010). Mothers also tend to provide more absolute child care and interactive care than fathers, yet the percentage of their time spent in interactive care is lower than fathers (Lyn 2006). Fathers are able to spend more time doing fun activities that are seen as elective rather than women, who are continually viewed by society as responsible for the care of their children (Vuori 2009). In the end, mothers continue to take on the majority of the household labor and child care even when fathers are involved in both of these areas (Dotti Sani 2014). For stay-at-home fathers, household labor is at times, a space to continue normative gendered roles where their rejection of household labor is associated with their constructions of masculinities.

For most families, the division of household labor and child care is a continual negotiation of roles and expectations that are influenced by many factors including relationships to outside work, religion and society. Cooper (2000) highlights these negotiations in his discussion of fathers working in Silicon Valley. Based on in-depth interviews with these fathers, Cooper shows the different ways these men continue to negotiate time working outside as well as within the home. In one example, a participant discusses tensions he feels when he watches multiple football games in a row, while his wife takes care of their children. The participant acknowledges the frustration his wife feels while also validating his actions based on his role as the breadwinner. In another study with in-depth interviews with married couples by Gottzen and colleges (2012), coaching children's sporting teams is viewed as household labor by male participants while their female partners see these activities as outside of the bounds of household labor. The disagreement on what counts as household labor leads to tensions between these couples. Tensions based on religious expectations of men's and women's roles also

impacts the ways that families negotiate the division of household labor, with women tending to take on more responsibilities (Aune 2010). Finally, societal expectations of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as care-givers continue to influence the ways families negotiate the division of household labor. Overall, family formations, care work and the division of household labor are all constructions that are continually being negotiated within family structures. Stay-at-home fathers are continually constructing their own identities as stay-at-home parents in relation to masculinities, fatherhood, and the ways in which this plays out in the division of household labor. By rejecting particular tasks of household labor, stay-at-home fathers are able to construct their masculinities similarly to dominant forms of masculinities.

Intersectionality

Finally, important to the discussion of the construction of masculinities and the role of the stay-at-home father is intersectionality. Missing from many discussions about masculinities, fatherhood, and the division of household labor is the question of who has access to the ideals associated with hegemonic masculinities and being a “good” father (Marsiglio and Hinojosa 2007, Marsiglio and Hutchinson 2004). Based on many factors, including class and religion, men may have different understandings and expectations of fatherhood and masculinities. In a study focusing on the construction of fatherhood in Sweden, Johansson and Klinth (2008) found that based on their interviews with fathers, different groups of men construct different views of fatherhood. Religious men in their study emphasized family and passing these values on to their children while men defined as immigrants focused more on how their economic and social conditions impacted

parenting with their partners. These different groups of men constructed fatherhood in different ways, which also impacts their negotiations of household labor within their families. Class and education also impact the ways in which men construct their role as fathers (Bianchi et al. 2000). Income level and job positions influence the amount of time working fathers can spend with their families as well as the ways they view their role in regards to providing for the family (Shows and Gerstel 2009, Gottzen and Kremer-Sadlik 2012, Hodges and Budig 2010 and Chesley 2011). Societal expectations associated with fatherhood impact the ways in which fathers construct and participate in fatherhood. Men continue to negotiate and construct their own understanding of fatherhood based on their social position, their access to outside work, and their personal relationships with their partners and children (Weber 2012). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the differences in experiences and access to perceived notions of good fathering based on factors like class, race and religion. For stay-at-home fathers, this also means constructing their position as fathers through care giving and providing in different ways.

The social location of stay-at-home fathers impacts how they came to the decision to stay home, how they feel about their position within the home, the portion of the household labor they participate in, and how they understand their masculinities within the position of a stay-at-home father. These elements, in turn, influence the experiences of their partners and their livable life. Zavella (1991) highlights the importance of focusing on the “social spaces created by the intersection of class, race, gender and culture,” (75). West and Fenstermaker (1995) also emphasize how intersecting identities impact the ways in which individuals construct gender, and in turn

create social inequality. By focusing on the themes of isolation, resistance and division of household labor, I capture the different ways fathers experience staying home to care for children and the larger impact their social location has on their self-identities.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines the ways fathers create a unique stay-at-home father identity while also conforming to and challenging traditional notions of masculinities. Chapter one situates this research in current empirical research with stay-at-home fathers. Also, the chapter outlines data collection and the methodology for this project.

In chapter two, I further discuss the intersectional analysis within this research. Specifically, I discuss in further detail the population of the study and the interview process. In addition, I examine how participants define their own identity as a stay-at-home father and the reasons for staying home to care for their children. Finally, I analyze the expectations fathers have for their time as the main care-giver for their children.

Chapter three examines how fathers both resist and conform to hegemonic masculine ideals through the rejection of feminine terms and mother-centric spaces. In addition, in this chapter I explore how fathers react to comments from family, friends, doctors and strangers about their role as a stay-at-home father. In these instances of tension, fathers are both resisting traditional expectations of masculinities while simultaneously participating in the construction of hegemonic masculinities.

Chapter four will highlight the division of household labor within stay-at-home father families. Although the majority of participants in this study are responsible for the

bulk of the household labor within their home, the types of household tasks they choose to not participate in are reflections of traditional gendered roles within the home. Also examined in this chapter are the tensions surrounding the division of household tasks and expectations of masculinities.

In chapter five, I examine how isolation influences participants' experiences as the main care-giver. This chapter focuses on the support systems participants rely on as stay-at-home fathers. In addition, feelings of isolation or needing less support are discussed in light of expectations of hegemonic masculinities.

Finally, chapter six examines how masculinities and power are at work in the lives of these stay-at-home fathers. Despite challenging traditional gender roles by staying home, in many ways these participants continue to value tenets of hegemonic masculinities. This chapter will bring together the analysis of the themes of resistance, the division of household labor and isolation to examine the ways participants are creating a unique stay-at-home identity tied specifically to fathers while continuing to support traditional expectations of masculinities. Finally, this chapter will address the needs for future research in order to further understand how stay-at-home fathers are both changing gendered notions of care-giving and supporting traditional expectations of masculinities.

CHAPTER 1

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the current empirical research focusing on stay-at-home fathers in order to contextualize this dissertation research. Additionally, this chapter highlights the research questions used for this study and outlines expected themes. Finally, this chapter describes the methodology used to understand how participants create their identities as stay-at-home fathers and men.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In various ways, fathers who stay home with their children and define themselves as the main caregivers of their children have similar responsibilities and expectations as stay-at-home mothers. Fathers are similar to mothers who stay home in the reasons they give for their decision to stay home, their emphasis on personal satisfaction and the desire to take care of the family. In addition to the many positive benefits that fathers experience similarly to mothers, they also experience similar negative consequences of staying home including loneliness (Zimmerman 2000). This comparison to stay-at-home mothers is important to this study because in many ways, these stay-at-home fathers are constructing a role that is both similar and distinctly different than the role of mothers. Through this comparison of stay-at-home mothers and stay-at-home fathers, past researchers highlight how gendered expectations impact the experiences of stay-at-home fathers.

Past research with stay-at-home fathers and mothers have examined the multiple ways in which mothers and fathers similarly construct the role of the stay-at-home parent

(Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015). Zimmerman (2000), in her two studies with 24 stay-at-home mother families and 26 stay-at-home father families found that all couples, regardless of who stayed at home, reported the desire for one parent to stay home and care for their children. In addition, couples in both studies reported that although their income would be higher if both spouses worked, it was more important for their children to experience parental care at home. Rubin and Wooten (2007) found that mothers also felt strongly about the importance of one parent at home with their children. They suggest that for these mothers, the decision to give up outside work was an emotional one based on what they felt would most benefit their children. Both studies by Zimmerman (2000) and Rubin and Wooten (2007), as well as others (Richards Solomon 2014; Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley and Scaringi 2008), highlight the importance both fathers and mothers put on having one parent at home with their children. While these families could benefit financially from both parents working, both stay-at-home father and stay-at-home mother families choose to have someone at home for their children's benefit (Rubin and Wooten 2007, Vejar et al. 2006). Fathers and mothers have also expressed personal satisfaction as a benefit to staying home (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley and Scaringi 2008). In both stay-at-home father and stay-at-home mother families, Zimmerman (2000) found that parents reported feeling satisfied in their position as stay-at-home parents as well as satisfied in their family arrangement and marriage. Chesley's (2011) study of the factors associated with the decision for fathers who stay home highlights this sense of satisfaction. She suggests that while the desire to stay home may not be central to the decision making process, it does help the satisfaction level of fathers in this position.

Finally, by staying home, fathers and mothers are able to take care of their family. While fatherhood is associated with providing for the family through breadwinning, by staying home, both fathers and mothers express feelings of providing for their families (Chesley 2011). Doucet (2006) found that fathers felt that working in the home or in the community through non-paid work, enabled them to provide for their family as well as maintain their masculine identity. In many ways, mothers also feel that they are able to provide for the family through their work within the home and care-giving (Dillaway and Paré 2008).

Although stay-at-home father's experiences parallel those of stay-at-home mothers in several, stay-at-home fathers are differentiated by the reasons they give for staying home, the societal expectations they confront about their ability to take care of children, and perceptions about their inability to live up to the breadwinning provider role. One of the most common reasons fathers give for their decision to stay at home with their children is economic (Chesley 2011; Doucet 2007, Latshaw 2011). While Zimmerman (2000) suggests that mothers who stay home also sometimes take finances into account, overwhelmingly fathers talk about staying home because of their economic situation. Stay-at-home father/career mother couples reported that the decision for the father to stay home was almost solely based on the mother's salary and benefits. These couples also suggested that the father's personality played a significant part in the decision. In comparison, for stay-at-home mother/career father families, the decision was more likely based on religious or family influences and many times, this decision was discussed even prior to marriage and children. Similarly, Chesley (2011) also found that job conditions play a large role in the decision for fathers to stay home. She observed

that the decision for fathers to stay home resulted from a sudden change in the father's job. These fathers based their decision to stay home on economic forces that allowed or forced them into staying home, rather than making the decision like the mothers in Zimmerman's (2000) study to stay home based on religious views or family influences.

Also, unlike mothers, who are continually looked to as experts in childcare, fathers who identify as stay-at-home parents and the main care-giver of their children tend to be seen in two ways: exceptional for taking on this traditionally feminine role or questioned for not living up to masculine expectations as the breadwinner and provider (Doucet 2006). When fathers take on the responsibilities of caring for children and the household labor, many times others act surprised and commend fathers for the work they are doing (Smith 2009). While mothers are rarely commended for their work as stay-at-home mothers, fathers are seen as exceptional for taking on this position (Dillaway and Paré 2008, Smith 2009). Women are expected to sacrifice for their children and family's well-being, and therefore are not receive the same positive attention that stay-at-home fathers sometimes experience (Coltrane 1996, Dillaway and Paré 2008). While some men do gain positive attention for staying home with their children, stay-at-home fathers also tend to experience some negative feedback for their position as stay-at-home parents. Many times stay-at-home fathers are faced with societal pressures that suggest that men biologically are not suited to care for children (Richards Solomon, Catherine 2014). Furthermore, fathers are seen as incompetent as care-givers and the children of these stay-at-home fathers are put at risk for dysfunction (Smith 2009). In addition to both positive and negative attention, fathers also suggested that they felt lonely, reporting that

they did not associate often with other stay-at-home fathers or stay-at-home mothers (Merla 2008; Zimmerman 2000).

These expectations for fathers to provide for the family through outside work are linked to normative definitions of fatherhood. For participants within this research, the traditional breadwinning role is an important aspect of how these stay-at-home fathers construct their own roles and masculinities. Despite not participating in outside work, these fathers are continually influenced by pressures associated with hegemonic masculinities and traditional understandings of fatherhood. This study highlights the ways these fathers construct their role as a stay-at-home father and the ways in which they construct their own masculinities in order to understand how gender expectations are both shifting and staying the same.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The theoretical framing of gender constructionism and the constructions of hegemonic masculinities, fatherhood, and the division of household labor are important in the analysis and understanding of how stay-at-home fathers construct their own identities as fathers and men. In order to contribute to the current literature around stay-at-home fathers, I explore three questions:

- 1) How do stay-at-home fathers construct their masculinities, specifically in relation to their social roles as fathers, partners, peers, etc.?
- 2) Is the negotiation of household labor, including care work and household tasks, in these families a reflection of shifting gender roles in the home where the primary caregiver is the father?

- 3) In what ways does social location and intersecting identities influence the ways in which fathers construct this stay-at-home identity?

This research emphasizes how these fathers understand their role as the stay-at-home father while challenging some traditionally dominant expectations of fatherhood.

Specifically, I use themes of isolation, resistance, and the division of household labor in order to analyze the multiple ways fathers experience their roles as stay-at-home father

DATA AND METHODS

Project design

This study uses 40 in-depth interviews to examine and understand how stay-at-home fathers construct both their identities as stay-at-home fathers and their own masculinities. In addition, observational data and informal interviews, defined as questions guided from the current interaction rather than planned interview questions (Creswell 2007), from the National At-Home Dad Network convention are used in order to explore the ways in which fathers discuss their masculinities and care-giving role within the context of other fathers. Through these avenues, I highlight the similarities and differences in experiences of fathers who identify as stay-at-home fathers and participate in at-home father groups, like the National At-Home Dad Network, fathers who identify as stay-at-home fathers but do not actively participate in at-home father groups, and fathers who do not identify as stay-at-home fathers but are the primary caregiver for their children. By looking at fathers who participate in stay-at-home father groups and interact with other stay-at-home fathers to varying degrees and fathers who may or may not identify as stay-at-home fathers, I examine the different ways fathers

construct their role as stay-at-home fathers as well as their construction of their masculinities.

Research Themes

Through the themes of isolation, resistance and the division of household labor, I explore both the similarities and differences participants experience in their roles as stay-at-home fathers and primary care-givers of their children. In addition, these themes highlight the multiple ways these fathers construct their own masculinities. Below, I define each of these three themes and discuss how these themes are operationalized and examined within this study.

The first theme I examine is resistance, defined as the complicated moments of tension between rejecting traditional notions of gendered care-giving roles and participating in gendered assumptions about parenting (Medved 2009). In the lives of stay-at-home fathers, these tensions are present in conversations with others, including their children's schools and doctors, who assume that participants are not the main care-giver. Resistance is also present in the ways fathers separate themselves from mothers or feminine spaces. I highlight the ways in which some stay-at-home fathers resist gendered assumptions about their parenting while others ignore expectations around fatherhood and masculinities.

The second theme, household labor, is defined as the unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or the home within couples (John, Shelton and Luschen 1995). Specifically, I examine the types of household tasks beyond care-giving that fathers participate in and their perception of the amount of time they spend on these tasks.

Previous research (Braun et. al 2008) suggests that men tend to take on specific tasks deemed “masculine,” such as yard work, leaving more “feminine” tasks to their female partners. For participants, involvement or rejection of household labor is a space to for stay-at-home fathers to construct and define gendered roles within the family. The division of household labor is examined by analyzing amount of time spent on household labor, participants’ estimated proportion of the household labor, the types of tasks participants do within the home, and who else within the home is also responsible for household labor. These questions will help me tease out how household labor is divided within the home. Rather than attempting to understand the actual time spent on particular tasks, the perception these fathers have about their work within the home is important to this research. While some studies (Braun et al. 2008) have also asked the partners of participants to articulate how the division of household labor works within the home, I intentionally only ask fathers. When talking with fathers about the division of household labor, rather than attempting to understand the actual time spent on particular tasks, I focus on the perception these fathers have on their work within the home. Although some of the tensions around the actual time spent on household labor may be lost by not including participants’ partners, I am interested in how participants see their work within the home.

The third theme, isolation, is defined as feelings of loneliness, separation from peers and community, and invisibility (Doucet and Merla 2007). Specifically for stay-at-home fathers, feelings of isolation occur because fathers have little access to other stay-at-home fathers, feel rejected from spaces traditionally held by stay-at-home mothers, like play groups or the park, and face the disapproval of family or friends (Whelan and

Lally 2002). Isolation is examined through interview questions that ask fathers about their involvement with other stay-at-home fathers and involvement with at-home dad groups and other stay-at-home parents. In addition, I ask about their involvement in their communities, family, and other organizations. Finally, I ask questions aimed at their feelings around being in the role of the stay-at-home parent in regards to feeling supported by family, friends and their community. In order to gain insight into how this may be different for different fathers, I interview fathers who identify as stay-at-home fathers and participate in at-home father groups, fathers who identify as stay-at-home fathers but do not associate with other stay-at-home fathers, and fathers who do not identify as a stay-at-home father but are the main care-giver of their children. By specifically looking for participants who meet these requirements, I can adequately represent the different experiences of these fathers. Participants who are actively involved with at-home father groups and other stay-at-home fathers were recruited through at-home dad organizations and online groups. Fathers who do not associate with these groups or do not identify as stay-at-home fathers were recruited through fliers at community organizations, schools and friends and colleagues.

These three themes help underscore the complex experiences of participants in this study and the multiple ways these fathers construct their role as a stay-at-home father and their masculinities. By focusing on isolation, resistance and the division of household labor, I tease out the ways in which fathers participate and reject traditional notions of masculinities as stay-at-home fathers.

Participants

In order to understand the varying experiences of stay-at-home fathers and fathers who are the main caregiver for their children, I recruited fathers who fall within these three categories: members of the national stay-at-home father organization and participate in the national convention and/or who participate in other local stay-at-home dad groups, fathers who identify as stay-at-home fathers but do not associate with other stay-at-home fathers, and fathers who may not identify as a stay-at-home parent but are the main caregiver of their children while their partner is the breadwinner. By including fathers with differing associations to the stay-at-home father role, I compare how these different groups of fathers construct their role and position as the main care-giver and stay-at-home father. The comparison of these groups allows me to examine the ways that fathers' identities as stay-at-home fathers impacts their experiences around isolation, resistance and the division of household labor. As mentioned previously, I use in-depth interviews, observational notes and informal interviews in order understand the experiences of these fathers. In order to ensure that this study has a diverse sample, I purposefully interviewed fathers that fall into one of these categories. In addition, I targeted particular organizations and meeting places these fathers may frequent in order to recruit participants in this study. However, despite recruiting efforts in multiple locations, participants who identify as a stay-at-home father were much more likely to agree to participate in this study. Despite using language that attempted to encourage all fathers to participate, overwhelmingly men who identify as stay-at-home fathers were more likely to participate. Therefore, that population is more represented in this study than other groups.

In addition to including participants from these different father groups, a diverse population of participants was recruited in order to understand and compare how fathers create and experience their identities as stay-at-home fathers or care-givers across different social locations. In order to include a diverse population of participants, a targeted recruitment for men of color and varying religious affiliations was utilized; however, the majority of participants were white. This may be linked to the focus of the study on staying home and the possible distrust some fathers have around questions about family. Some men may be wary of being labeled as jobless and do not want to participate in a research study that would highlight their experiences in the home

Classification

For the purposes of this study, stay-at-home fathers are defined as fathers who are the primary caretakers of their household's children and whose partners are the family's major breadwinners (Latshaw 2011). In previous studies (Chesley 2011, Doucet 2007) the term "stay-at-home father" has been used to describe these fathers; however, some of the fathers in this study do not use this term to describe themselves. Instead, the National At-Home Dad Network (2014) uses the term "at-home" to reflect their position as the main care-giver while also suggesting that they are not only "staying" home. Rather, these fathers are actively participating in their children's lives and are active members of their household. Other fathers within this study do not use the term stay-at home father or "at-home" father to describe their position. For these fathers, their time caring for their children may be constructed as temporary and therefore these fathers do not identify as a stay-at-home father. Because of the varied labels participants use to describe

themselves, I will continue to use the term stay-at-home father to describe participants as a whole, however, when referring to specific groups or individual participants, I will use the terms they use to identify themselves.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Participants were recruited through colleagues and others who know stay-at-home fathers and fathers who are the primary care-givers for their families. Participants were also recruited through connections made at the National At-Home Dad Network convention. Fathers who participated in this convention shared the project with their local stay-at-home father organizations, allowing for a study population from cities across the United States. In addition, participants were recruited through fliers available at community organizations, such as school boards and churches, and after school organizations such as the YMCA. Some community organizations specifically were chosen in order to include a diverse sample of fathers. Furthermore, online groups for fathers and parents were contacted in order to recruit fathers.

Interviews were conducted either in a public location of the participant's choice or via phone or video call. As a stay-at-home parent, participants have various schedules and availability, so in order accommodate a father's ability to participate, interviews were conducted both in-person and over the phone. This also allowed fathers to control the environment in which they participated in the study. As a childless woman, characteristics that may make participants feel uncomfortable, my hope was to allow participants to feel the most comfortable during the interview process. By giving participants the option of meeting in-person or over the phone, I believe I was able to

create an environment that allowed fathers to be comfortable and open throughout the interviews.

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed either by me or a paid transcriptionist. I utilize the methods of grounded theory to examine the ways in which the isolation, resistance and the division of household labor play into the construction of masculinities by these stay-at-home fathers. In this context, grounded theory is defined as a method that “consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves,” (Charmaz 2006). For this study, data collection and analysis was guided by themes highlighted in previous literature including isolation, resistance and the division of household labor. Specifically, I use a constructivist approach, articulated by Kathy Charmaz (2006) that highlights the importance of the meanings individuals attribute to the focus of the study. I am interested in the participants’ thoughts, feelings and viewpoints as well as the ways they create their own narratives of their position (Mills 2006). Theoretical themes based on the literature, were used as a starting point for analysis. Data collection began in October 2014 at the national stay-at-home father convention. Data collection continued through May 2015, ending because saturation was reached within the study sample. Informed by Straus and Corbin (1990), data analysis began while data was still being collected in order to help direct participant interviews. Interviews and observational data were read several times, to identify unifying themes. Codes were created and continually reevaluated in order to assure data was continually

being evaluated (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Line-by-line coding was also employed. In addition, codes were then systematically evaluated and grouped into larger unifying concepts. Coding and analysis were guided by strategies outlined by Saldaña (2013) in *The Manual for Qualitative Coding*. The qualitative research analysis software, Dedoose was utilized to the organize interview and observational data, themes, codes and codebook.

CONCLUSION

This research addresses how participants construct their masculinities and identities as stay-at-home fathers. The use of grounded theory will allow me the flexibility to examine how participants understand their role at home within the context of their own lived experiences. In the next chapter, I will examine how participants construct their reasons for staying home and how traditional expectations of masculinities are at work within the narratives of participants.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING THE ROLE OF STAY-AT-HOME FATHERS

The question there lies is well this choice that you're going to make, is it - is it what's best for your family? And, you know, hands down it obviously was, you know, it definitely is, because here he gets to be at home, when he's with a parent. You can't top that. That was really the first week. I just wanted to kind of see, okay how does this going to...you know...how does this really stand by way of our beliefs and, you know, and family, you know, I kind of feel that way out there, of course. You know, ran it by my mother, you know, you do those sorts of things.

Logan, age 42

Key to this study is how participants define themselves as fathers and the main care-givers of their children. In the short narrative above, Logan highlights the conflict he experienced as he decided to stay home with his two-year-old son. Not only does he make this decision with his wife, he also goes on to discuss it with his local leaders of the Church of Latter Day Saints and his mother in order to make sure this is the best decision for himself and his family. When he says that he feels “way out there,” he is directly discussing how this decision, for him and many men, challenges traditional expectations of hegemonic masculinities and fatherhood in the United States. Throughout the narratives around the decision to stay home are examples of the struggle to both reconcile and reject traditional expectations of masculinities. These tensions are very present in the way fathers define themselves in relation to their role at home, the reasons for deciding to stay home, and their expectations within this role. In this chapter, I address and examine these tensions. In addition, this chapter will further discuss the population of this study and its impact on the results of this dissertation research.

DEFINING THEMSELVES

Central to this study is how fathers define and label themselves as they care for their children. Fathers within this study give several names that they use including “stay-at-home father,” “at-home dad,” “dad,” or “primary care-giver.” In addition, five (13%) fathers continue to define themselves in relation to their previous occupations. These different identities or labels reflect how fathers view themselves and how they would like to be perceived by others.

The most common label participants use to describe their experiences as the main care-giver for their children is “stay-at-home father.” 58 percent (n =23) of fathers in this study use the term “stay-at-home father” when asked how they would label themselves while eight percent (n = 3) of fathers identify as “at-home” fathers. Participants who describe themselves as “at-home” fathers define themselves as fathers who are not “just at home,” rather they are participating and active in the lives of their children, suggesting that the term “stay-at-home father” constructs fathers as only at home and not involved. In addition, this term helps differentiate these fathers from the role of the stay-at-home mother. Another eight percent (n=3) define themselves simply as “fathers” rather than attaching themselves to a label that suggests they are the main care-giver. Three percent (n =1) of the study’s sample define themselves as a care-giver. 15 percent (n = 6) of participants identify themselves based on their occupation, regardless of whether they were employed at the time of the interview. Finally, ten percent (n = 4) of participants did not identify themselves around fatherhood or occupation.

The terms fathers use to identify themselves are important to this study because in many ways these fathers are attempting to create a role that is uniquely tied to masculinities and fatherhood. The label these fathers use for themselves is not always static but complex and fluid as they come to their own understanding of this role. Kevin, age 50 and the father of two elementary-aged children discusses his internal feelings as he transitioned into staying home.

Initially, I said that I was a struggling writer. And so, I did write and I have been writing for a long time but after about three years I realized that that wasn't true. So then, I was more willing to tell the truth. Because by that time, I had begun seeing the dramatic improvement in my kids by having parenting and a supervised environment all the time and so I didn't feel like it was a waste of time anymore. In the beginning, I struggled with what I was doing and why. Guys, universally didn't understand the choice and women, well women didn't either. It was one of those things that was just universally misunderstood for a variety of reasons.

When first staying home, Kevin struggled to identify as a stay-at-home father because he felt as if in some ways it was a “waste of time.” Originally an airline pilot, Kevin wrestled with the transition to his new role as the main care-giver for his children. Due to illness and disliking the time he needed to be away from his infant son while flying, Kevin decided to quit his job to care for his son with the idea that he would also spend his time writing. Although staying home is important to Kevin and the well-being of his family, he had trouble viewing caring for his son as a legitimate use of his time. Because fatherhood is closely tied to financially providing for his family, he viewed his time at home as a “waste” because he was not financially contributing to the family's income. As time passed, Kevin began to see the benefits to his time at home in the life of his son and eventually the life of his daughter. Seeing his children prosper gives Kevin the assurance that he made a positive decision to stay home. It is then that he felt comfortable

identifying as a stay-at-home father. He could see he was succeeding and benefiting his children.

Despite the varying labels fathers give themselves to describe their role within the home, there are four distinct groups of fathers within this study. Table 1 highlights the characteristics of each of these groups. Twenty-five percent ($n = 10$) of the study's sample participate in both local and the national fathers' organizations for stay-at-home fathers. The average age of participants in this group at the time of the interview is 41 while the average age at the time of the birth of their first child is 35. Participants in this group are on average older both at the time of the interview and the time of the birth of their first child than any other group of participants. Fathers (10%, $n = 4$) who only participated in local organizations are on average 37.3 years old and were on average 32 when their first child was born. 35 percent ($n = 14$) of fathers were only involved with the national organization. These participants are on average 40 years old and were on average 32 years old when their first child was born. Finally, the youngest group of fathers are those who did not participate in either local or national stay-at-home father organizations (30%, $n = 12$). These participants are on average 36 years old and on average 32 years old at the time of the birth of their first child. In addition, this is the only group of participants that do not all identify as a stay-at-home father. 42 percent ($n=5$) of fathers who do not participate in local or national organizations do not identify as a stay-at-home father but instead their identities were related to their previous occupations.

Originally, I did not anticipate many differences between fathers who are actively involved with both the national organization and local stay-at-home father organizations

with participants who are only involved with either local or national groups. However, fathers involved with both local and national organizations are slightly older, more likely to own their homes, and hold more post-graduate degrees than other participants in the study. These ten participants all identified as stay-at-home fathers. Similarly, fathers who were involved with either the national organization or a local organization of stay-at-home fathers also identified as stay-at-home fathers or a label that referred to their time at home.

Participants involved with local organizations only are on average three years younger than fathers who participate in both local and the national organization. Two fathers in this group identify as protestant while the other two participants identify as atheist or non-religious. All participants hold bachelor degrees and identified as white. Fathers who participate in both local and national organizations also made up the smallest of the groups of participants. Participants who are only involved with the national organization were slightly more diverse than those fathers only participating in local organizations. While these fathers also all identify as stay-at-home fathers, their religious affiliations are much more diverse than any other group. In addition, a higher percentage of participants in this group rent their homes.

Finally, participants who are not involved with either local or the national groups for stay-at-home fathers are much less likely to identify as a stay-at-home father. While seven fathers continue to identify as stay-at-home fathers, five fathers did not. This group of fathers were younger on average than the other groups but continued to have their first child around the same age as other fathers in the study. This group of fathers is

more likely to be at home a shorter time and their time at home is constructed as more temporary than other participants.

These four groups are important to this study because they highlight the different ways these fathers view themselves and help create a stay-at-home father identity. Participants involved with both local and the national organizations are more likely to focus on the injustices and gendered expectations around staying home than fathers not involved with these organizations. Participants only involved with the national organization tend to be loosely tied to the organization. While they may participate in the national convention, most of the year they do not have much interaction or support from other stay-at-home fathers. For fathers involved with both local and the national organization, participation in the national organization involves regularly attending the national convention and being involved in the direction of the organization. This is then passed on to the local organizations as well. These fathers, along with participants involved with only local groups are more likely to know other stay-at-home fathers and feel supported by other fathers. These different experiences and interactions with other stay-at-home fathers impacts the ways these fathers see themselves in the stay-at-home father role and how they construct this identity.

THE DECISION TO STAY HOME

The reasons behind why fathers decide to stay home and care for their children is another aspect that impacts the ways fathers construct their identity as a stay-at-home parent. One of the main reasons participants give for deciding to stay home to care for their children is based on economic factors. Fathers list their job changes, their wife's

career, and not making enough money on their salary to pay for childcare all as economic reasons to stay home. Many times throughout the interview, participants list several reasons for choosing to stay home. However, staying home is always framed as a choice. Even for fathers whose time in the home was influence by job loss or encountered other unforeseen circumstances, it was always constructed as a choice. By doing so, participants' project a sense of control over their situations, allowing them to continue to participate in tenets of hegemonic masculinities. Specifically, these fathers construct the decision to stay home with their children as a choice as a way to show their power and control over this life change, regardless of their actual control over the situation. Constructing the decision as a choice was consistent for all fathers, even participants who are not involved in a stay-at-home father group or do not identify as a stay-at-home father. This is important because using language to describe their time at home as a choice or decision creates the impression that participants are fully in control of their employment and time at home. Because employment is so closely linked to masculinities and fatherhood, not having control over this decision may make participants look as if they are lazy or unable to work. Constructing their time at home as a choice creates a sense of control for these fathers and projects their role as stay-at-home fathers as purposeful.

Economic

One of the factors fathers highlight when discussing economic reasons for staying home with their children is a change in jobs. After spending time working as a consultant

in quality management, Sebastian simply describes his job change as necessary. At the same time, he and his wife are discussing who should be the one to stay home.

So, I was ready for a professional change and decided kind of well we want to have somebody at home and it was clear to me that she loved her job. It was pretty easy because she actually co-founded the organization and then since I was looking for a change uh I...well we decided that it would be - it would be I who stay home.

Sebastian makes it clear that he was looking for a professional change around the time they decided to be home. What is left unsaid in the interview is why Sebastian chose this time to make a professional change. He constructs this decision as a convenient time to decide to stay home but not directly related to making the decision to stay home to care for his children. By constructing this as a career change and not a direct decision to stay home, Sebastian continues to use language associated with working outside the home. Rather than constructing the decision around caring for his children, he suggests that his desire for a change in positions made it possible to stay home. By doing this he does not construct his decision at home to be motivated by a desire to care for his children but convenient, separating himself from expectations of motherhood and care-giving.

Similarly, Oscar also made changes to his job in order to care for his children while his partner worked outside the home.

So, what happened was at work - they - at my work – they said that they were going to start up a weekend crew working Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Where our previous shifts we were - they were supposed to be working but we were ending up working...between 5 to 7 11 hour days. So we made the decision when we did that to go me working weekends since I was basically already working weekends. We would save \$500 a month for childcare so that we would only need a baby sitter 1 day a week verses 5 days a week. And I'd get to see the kids I mean that - that was the big thing is that I would be home for 4 days versus being home maybe a Sunday every so often. What the good thing was is that the opportunity came up to work, to say "Hey, we're starting up this weekend crew and we're asking for volunteers."

Oscar highlights how this decision not only allows his family to save money by not paying for a babysitter, but enables him to spend more time with his children. As with almost all of participants, the reasons for staying home may be based around one aspect but there are multiple factors that go into making this complicated decision. While participants may highlight only one part of their decision to stay home, it is important to remember that these decisions are multifaceted. Isaac, a father of a young son, discusses his decision to stay home after losing his job.

We talked a lot about that because she was established in her career and was making a substantial amount more than I was because I was just coming out of the Marine Corps. I was starting at the bottom and working my way up. She still wasn't sold and then luckily, if you want to call it that, I was laid off one month before my daughter was born. Made the decision for us. Well it was actually horrible timing. My wife and I had just signed a contract for a construction project on our house and had just come back from a trip and my wife was eight months pregnant. I go into work and they had started the layoffs while I was gone and I was like "Really?" It was the day I got back. It worked out really well in the end.

One of the main reasons Isaac decided to stay home was because he lost his job around the time his wife was about to have their first child. However, being the stay-at-home parent was already discussed before he lost his job. He constructs this narrative around how he became a stay-at-home father as multiple factors allowing him make the decision to stay home. He says, "she wasn't sold and then luckily" he lost his job. This suggests that he had already made the decision to stay home but needed his wife to agree. When he lost his job, the change allowed him to stay home. Losing his job may have been much harder on Isaac but he constructs this loss as just one of the factors that created the situation for him to stay home. By confirming that "it worked out really well in the end,"

he downplays his job loss and constructs his presence at home as a way to provide for his family.

All three of these examples highlight how different job changes helped create a way for these stay-at-home fathers to stay home. Another aspect of how economics influenced fathers' decision to stay home was the career and income level of their partners. Fathers talk about their wife's career as a strong influencing factor for why they are the one remaining home. Specifically, these participants focus on their wife's income as being enough to support their family. By focusing on their financial situation and their partner's ability to make a substantial amount of money, these fathers suggest that their time at home is not a burden to their family. They are not needed to be the breadwinner because their family is financially stable, allowing for them to stay home.

Wyatt, simply stated, "My wife makes more money, than I do. I just - it was a monetary decision. So yeah, I'm probably not going to have another job ever which is odd to say." He explains that they have also decided to homeschool their kids and by the time they are all out of school, he will be of retirement age. While his quick answer to why he decided to stay home focused solely on financial reasons, he highlights some of the tension around this decision by commenting on how "odd" it is for him to not have another job, even after his kids are grown. His focus on his wife's income allows him to show that his family is not suffering financially without his income. His family is financially stable; therefore he is able to show that it is more important to provide for his family through care-giving than breadwinning.

Charlie also discusses how his wife is the breadwinner for his family, giving him the financial freedom to stay home with their children.

My wife and I whenever we got married and decided we wanted to have kids we basically talked back and forth and decided that her job would be - we'd be blessed enough to where her job would bring home enough money to where I would not have to work but even if I wanted to work, the only thing that my salary would go towards would be paying for childcare. So we figured, together both of us that it's really pointless to have one person working when it pays for childcare whenever that person could stay home and basically raise and take care of the kids.

Even before they had children, Charlie and his wife decided she would be the breadwinner while he would stay home. When talking about making the decision, Charlie goes on to talk about his feelings toward the decision, saying that he does “not have a problem” with being the one at home.

It was kind of briefly talked about whenever we first - when we first were getting engaged about with my wife's profession that she would be the breadwinner of the (sighs) - she - the breadwinner - I mean she would be the income of our family. At that time, and even still to this day, I did not have a problem with that. So it just made - made the most sense the natural conclusion was to go ahead and have me be the one to stay at home with the children.

Here, Charlie highlights the tensions around being a stay-at-home father and expectations of hegemonic masculinities. By saying he was and is still okay being the stay-at-home parent, he is acknowledging that this is a position that is not always seen as masculine. Even in his retelling of how he and his wife talked about who would stay home, his tone suggests that she strongly encouraged him to stay home because her profession would allow her to be the breadwinner of the family. His audible sigh before explaining that she is the breadwinner of the family suggests that he may not be as comfortable with the decision as the rest of his narrative portrays. However, at the same time, by saying he has “no problem” with staying home, he also takes ownership over the decision, showing that he was in control while making the decision to stay home. By saying that he does “not

have a problem” with staying home, he is suggesting that if he did, he would not be the stay-at-home father.

Evan also highlights his wife’s career as a reason for him to stay home. He explains the decision for him to stay home as a financial decision based on his wife’s income but also emphasizes that his temperament was better suited to being the stay-at-home parent.

The fact is that my wife had a very well established career, and to be honest, I had a job. Like I said, I barely made the average income of the United States in 2006 and my wife makes more. Plus I had a little more patience and a little better temper to deal with the two of our children, because we have twins. And so it just, to her, it made a little more sense as well. It would be nice to have someone at home. I have been at home, well they were born December 15th of 2005. Eight days after I turned 40 and since essentially since February 9th and after my wife went back to work in March of 2006, it’s just been my twins and myself.

For Evan, the decision was constructed as linked to his wife’s earning potential and career but he also suggests that his temperament influenced the decision for him to stay home. By constructing the decision as linked to his partner’s income, the decision is described as a practical decision around income. However, part of the decision to stay home also was his ability to care for his children at home because of his patience and temperament. By not highlighting this as the main reason, Evan downplays aspects of staying home that are not viewed as masculine.

In all three of these examples, participants suggest that their wife’s career influenced their decision to stay home. Throughout these discussions, tensions associated with expectations of traditional notions of masculinities are present in the ways these fathers talk about their decision to stay home. The tone of voice and sighs made by Charlie when describing the process of deciding to stay home suggest that there are more

tensions present in his role than he admits. Evan's downplaying of his patience and temperament influencing the decision to stay home and Isaac's dismissal of his job loss are all example of the tensions these fathers experience around expectations of hegemonic masculinities and fatherhood while deciding to stay home with their children.

Finally, fathers also talk about not making enough money to make it worth working outside the home. Many times, this means they were not making enough money to cover the expenses associated with child care or their partner made enough that their income was not needed. Like many of these narratives, the decision to stay home was multi-faceted.

Matthew describes his decision as driven both by monetary issues and a desire to be with his family. He says, "I worked longer hours and meetings at night and I didn't spend a lot of time with the family. She had a long-term more earning potential and it made more sense for me to stay at home with the kids and be the at-home parent." Before deciding to stay home, Matthew was a project manager in research and development and had earned a master's degree. While his earning potential was not as high as his wife's, he had also committed several years to his education and career. Giving this up to stay home with his children was an enormous change. One aspect that may assist Matthew and other fathers in this study not feel conflicted was the timing in their careers and lives that they made the decision to stay home. The majority of fathers in this study had children later in life (after 34) and had experienced successful careers before deciding to stay home

Another common comment from stay-at-home fathers while talking about their decision to stay home was around the amount of money they were making before staying

home. Specifically, several fathers discuss how the money from their positions would only go to pay for babysitting rather than also contribute to the rest of the household expenses. Rather than focus on the income of their partner, these participants specifically discuss how they viewed working outside the home not worth the amount of money they were making. Owen highlights this in the following quote:

Well part of that conversation then went to how much does a teacher make, how much would you make and then we just started to - to kind of figure out if it was worth just me teaching to put Ladd into daycare and basically it - what we've decided - what we decided was we would rather have a parent raise our child and not pay somebody else to raise him. And basically my salary would be going directly to somebody else. So the benefits of me staying home kind of outweighed the um benefits of working so. And my wife made, you know, basically made enough for us to, you know, live and, you know, have - have a lifestyle that being how we - she likes to travel and stuff, so...um so that's how we came about it and basically... it just - it - it works out, you know.

While he makes the point that his salary would not cover more than the cost of daycare, he also suggests that his decision to stay home was also motivated by a desire to help raise his children rather than entrust them to a babysitter. Similarly, Trevor recalls why he and his wife decided he should stay home.

So my position at the community center, I was on call 7 days a week. I worked 6 weeks in the winter time. I worked in the evenings and then some - and weekends every third month, and so - and then just all the calculations of well I'm bring home the take home pay verses paying for childcare in this area. I essentially was paying - essentially I - my entire paycheck was going to childcare and gas. My wife was paying the last 2 weeks of gas per month, so the only benefit was insurance. Other than that so. And then the retirement plan but being on call 7 days a week for minimal salary got old quick.

Like Owen, Trevor's decision to stay home was influenced by finances but also the desire to have a parent at home. Finally, Grant discusses a similar story.

I was making a lot less money than what my wife could - could have been making, is making. So it was just a matter of whether or not we were going to - how we were going to continue to work outside the home, you know, making kind

of...not minimum wage but not much better than that just doing kind of odd jobs and then just giving that money to a - a daycare center to have somebody else take care of our kids. What if I just do it and...You know, not have to pay other people to do it? So yeah, it was not a very long conversation, it was we - we did the math and it was pretty much like...you know we pretty much breakeven but and then have to have somebody else take care of our children, so it wasn't worth it to us.

Grant reiterates what both Owen and Trevor have said around the desire to have someone at home to care for their kids. In all three of these situations, fathers cite their income as the reason they decided to stay home; however, they also emphasize the importance of having a parent at home. For these men, working outside of the home in order to pay for daycare was not worth it if they could not significantly contribute to the household finances. Rather, they all chose to stay home with their children.

Best for Children

Another reason fathers emphasize as part of their decision to stay home relates to what they view as “best” for their children. For many fathers this is a significant factor in their decision to stay home. Of those who discuss staying home for their children, three different factors emerged. First, fathers discuss their belief that it is important that a parent should be home with children as they grow up. Another reason fathers give for staying home is to keep their children out of daycare. Fathers focus not only on the economic aspect of daycare but also the desire that their children should be at home. Finally, participants focus on their relationship with their children as a factor in deciding to stay home. For all three of these areas, the decision to stay home was framed as what was best for their children.

Having a parent at home with their children is an important factor for participants as they make the decision to stay home. Brent, a father of two children, frames his entire decision to stay home around the importance of having a parent at home while his children were young.

I'm just, 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.

For Brent and his wife, it was important to have someone at home while the kids were young. During the week, Brent stays home while his wife works outside the home. On the weekends, he helps with the finances by serving tables at a local restaurant. For their family, a parent at home is so important to them that they built their schedules around it, allowing for Brent to stay home during the week. Similarly, Sean also decided to stay home because of the value he and his partner put on having one person at home.

My wife and I always decided, when we got married we discussed that if we had kids, it would be awesome if one of us could stay at home. We decided that at the time that because she's more successful, she's kind of a little more driven as far as work goes, and so that worked out perfectly. I'm probably a little more patient.

For Sean, his decision to stay home is based on multiple factors including his desire to have someone at home for his children. He further discusses his feelings toward being home when he says, "Oh I was all for it. I was, uh, that was my preference. We figured that by time we got married that when it came to us having kids, I would stay at home. So yeah, very happy about it." His desire to be home for his children is apparent in his discussion of this decision. By highlighting that he preferred to be home, he shows how he had control and power within the decision, both aspects associated with hegemonic

masculinities. Will also shares in this desire to be home for his children however, his decision was also impacted by the economy at the time.

My wife and I decided we wanted to have our kids. We knew we wanted someone home and at the time, she was in med school and so, it just - we really didn't want to send the kids to daycare and she was in med school and that was kind of...you're in until you're done so I shut down my stuff cause it was right about when the economy went to crap.

In this narrative, Will frames his decision to stay home around his desire to be with his children, however, he also mentions that his business was not as successful because of the economy at the time. He constructs the decision to stay home with his children as a choice despite his struggling business and failing economy. Regardless of whether Will chose to stay home or was forced to because he lost his business, his description of this decision as a choice highlights how he attempts to show his power of the situation. Also, in his narrative, he states that they did not want to send their kids to daycare and his wife was unable to watch them because she was in medical school at the time. By automatically describing the reasons his wife is unable to watch the children, he makes gendered assumptions about who the default care-giver should be. Only after his wife was unavailable, does Will step in to care for the children.

Before fathers are able to discuss the desire to have someone at home, economic resources are required to support a family on one income. These participants and their partners are highly educated and hold positions that allow for participants to stay home. Despite the desire, not all families are able to support a family on one income. Access to high paying positions for participants' partners allow these families to prioritize having one parent home.

Another reason fathers give for staying home is their desire to not put their children in daycare. Similar to fathers who emphasize having a parent at home, these fathers feel it is best to raise their children exclusively at home rather than sending them to day care for part of the day. Benjamin, when discussing his decision to stay home focused, his decision around keeping his children out of daycare.

I mean I've always - I think that with - with um my partner we - we've discussed having children and we were like, you know, we don't really um want to just have a child just to, you know, six months later put him or her into a, you know, have a baby and six months later but him into a - We want to be present for our children. We want to - we - help guide them through their developments and be part of that. So the only way we can really do that is by um - and, you know, we really value the - the first couple of years of life as, you know, some of the most important years of human beings' you know, development and we want to be kind of (pause) you know, in charge of that.

Benjamin emphasizes his desire to be in charge of his children's development and felt like leaving them in daycare would hinder that. Similarly, Hunter also wanted to keep his children out of daycare not only so he could spend time with them but also for the financial aspect. He also adds that his temperament and desire to please his wife influenced the decision to stay home.

Well yeah, just, it started off that it made sense. She had a year's, she was able to take a year maternity. So I worked as much as I could that first year. Then we were deciding, we were looking at where I was. I had actually just gotten, I had just been there for over a year so I was getting incentives or whatever. I mean the 401k or whatever but it didn't make sense for me because I would be travelling and working. And we have for the two kids, we have twins, two people in daycare, two this, two that. Well even if we had - we figured out that it would have been about a wash, which isn't worth it. I think I might have even made a little more than it would have been but it's still not worth it. It was just... It wasn't worth it. Plus, I'm just so easy. If my wife wants something then "Yes, dear. Okay, dear." I'm all about happy wife, happy life. So I just do whatever. I just keep her and the girls happy. That's all...I just plug along, try to keep them happy when they're happy, I'm content.

Throughout this narrative, Hunter cites several reasons for staying home but focuses on not wanting to send his children to daycare. Although he would have made more than needed to send his children to daycare, it was important to Hunter to care for his children at home. Because his job would force him to travel and work away from the home for long periods of time, he decided to stay home. Hunter and his family are in a financial position to weigh these options and opt for Hunter to give up outside work to stay home. Their family has the economic privilege that allows them to make this decision. Liam also shares similar feelings around daycare when discussing his decision to stay home.

After five years of teaching, life was...we had a second child and we just decided that two kids with grandma wasn't going to work out that well. So I offered to stay home and take a leave and then get my job back after that. So I did that for a school year. That was in the 2000-2001 school year and it went well. That was my oldest daughter's first year of kindergarten so I had to take her to school every day. Then my second daughter had just turned one. And then my wife was finishing medical school in the fall of 2001 and I went back and taught that school year. Then she started residency that summer, July 2002. It was just a natural thing for me to do because at that time we had just had third child in 2001 and so the idea of having two kids in daycare would basically be the same cost for me to be a teacher. We had moved to Iowa for her residency from Wisconsin, where we were. So there wasn't really any...financially, it wouldn't make sense really, if we could live on her salary as a resident even, for me to stay home. So it was much easier. Plus the thought of trying to shuffle kids to day care and where ever else they needed to be and me still trying to teach and her crazy schedule. It just wasn't going to work so, I stayed home then and now it's been 14 years, 13 years.

For Liam, several factors influenced the decision for him to stay home, including his desire to not want to pay for daycare for his five children. He also acknowledges that relying on his mother-in-law as a care-giver would not work long term. His narrative around the decision to stay home highlights that while may be a main reason for deciding to stay home, with most fathers there are multiple factors that influence their decision and make staying home possible.

Finally, fathers also discuss their relationship with their children as one of the most important factors in their decision to stay home. Kevin, a father who stayed home with his children twice, discusses his first decision to stay home and give up his work as an airline pilot.

The first time was after my son was born, my first child. At the time, I was an airline pilot and I was flying twenty days a month. There's a certain process that happens with newborns with where the children bond to both their parents. It's a very important process and 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. 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 because they didn't get the choice between family and flying. So the writing was very clear to me and what was important, so that's where that first decision came from.

Kevin's experience not bonding with his child resulted in him becoming physically sick. Rather than continue flying, he decided that it would be best to stay home with his child. Like mentioned before, Kevin and his partner's financial stability allowed for him to make the decision to stay home. For many fathers in the U.S., this decision would not be possible. Jude addresses this privilege in his narrative around deciding to stay home in order to cultivate his relationship with his son.

Fortunately my wife does well enough that I have never, there's never been that much pressure on me and that part is really good. I know that most people can't, don't end up in that position. So that was really good but I remember saying this all the time when I first stayed home with the kids, or with Henry, our son, when I was first going to do it, you know, I remember thinking, you know, nobody later

in their life or when they are about ready to die, geez, I just wish I had worked more when the kids were young. Nobody ever says that. So I thought, why not it do it. We can, and you know it really worked out good. But I was, okay let's see, I think that age is kind of important in this discussion because I'm just, barely turned fifty. So if you take twelve years, let's see no wait, no twelve years ago, I was thirty-eight and I could do it then. I could stay home and handle it and you know just doing that, being home with him. It was a little bit of an adjustment, I've got to admit, being away from the office and all of that sort of emotionally stuff, so initially that was kind of hard. But you know, at thirty-eight, I could do it. If I'd gone back to like age thirty and done it, I think it would have been real difficult to be away from all that. When I was thirty, I needed to be, at least I felt like I wanted to be in an office, you know with all that stuff, hopefully being around town where it's exciting. You know there's tons of things going on. So that was helpful, to be a little older, I think it made it easier to do.

Jude highlights how his partner was able to support their family and his income was not always needed. He also addresses how his age affected his feelings toward staying home with his children. As an older father and someone who has been working in his career for several years, he felt more confident at leaving his position to stay home than he would have if he were younger. This population of fathers on average had their first child at 34 while the U.S. average for men is around 28. Because this group of men tends to be older, they have had opportunities to prove themselves in the workplace. This allows them to feel connected to hegemonic masculinities while still staying home.

Finally, Caleb discusses his desire to be at home in order to spend time with his children. However, he is frank when he talks about how several factors went into the decision to stay home.

There were a lot of other factors, I mean, I really wanted to do it just in general, I liked the idea of having a kid and then being the one involved in raising him was something important to me and then outside of that there were other factors too cause it's never a single factor decision. My career — my career had not gone on the path that I wanted, I wanted to go into journalism. I had studied for that in college. My degree was in Photography but I spent five years working for a newspaper and then working my way up through the institution there. When I got out of college the newspapers collapsed. Went to a job in marketing. Marketing

was not what I wanted to do but I could do it and then it was a small firm so my advancement opportunities were pretty limited without leaving the firm. It was a small family firm, I had no desire to leave unless I had something to fall back to. Um, her earning potential was definitely a lot greater than mine. Um I had been furloughed and um hours were cut back, that kind of thing, cause I was working for real estate service industry. It was right before the affordable care act so there was a lot of money coming into the field so her earning potential was just going up and mine was flat lining, well, kind of going down, so when we put all those decisions together into a hat, it was pretty much a no brainer for me to stay at home. We also looked at the fact that daycare in this area is one of the highest per capita in the U.S. My take home pay from my job would basically just cover daycare expenses. Um so, it was a very easy decision um, most of the factors we looked at basically led to the idea of me being the one to stay.

Caleb highlights his desire to be at home with his son, however, also indicates that there were multiple reasons for deciding to stay home. This narrative underscores how complex this decision to stay home can be for these fathers. Despite many of them having one main reason for staying home, several factors, including economics and what they view is best for their children, impact how they make their decision to stay home.

In some ways, these reasons for staying home are similar to those of stay-at-home mothers. Researchers suggest that mothers also decide to stay home because it is best for their children and economically best for their family (Giele 2008, Dillaway and Paré 2008). However, mothers are also culturally viewed as more invested in the care-giving of children, creating additional pressure associated with care-giving and the decision to stay home not experienced by fathers (Villalobos 2014). Fathers do not have the same expectations associated with their role in the home even as the main care-giver, allowing for more control than stay-at-home mothers. By not having the same cultural expectations associated with intensive mother, these fathers have more freedom in their role at home and if and when they plan to return to the workforce.

Timing of Decision and Future Expectations

Another important part of the decision to stay home for these fathers was the timing of the decision. Previous research indicates that stay-at-home mothers tend to make the decision to be at home prior to having kids and many times even before they are married to their partners (Zimmerman 2000). Many stay-at-home fathers made their decision when their partners were pregnant with their child or even after the birth of their child. The timing of this decision reflects traditional expectations for both men and women. Several fathers discuss having had conversations with their partners before marriage about one parent staying home but rarely was he the assumed care-giver.

One exception to this was Dalton, who decided along with his wife, to be the stay-at-home father before they were married.

We were not yet married. We were having a discussion about getting married, and having kids, and basic ideas and philosophies about you know whether we wanted kids and how many. You know the discussion. Most - most people who are serious about uh pursuing a relationship have some form of this discussion at some point. We'll call it the compatibility discussion. So we're talking about kids and she starts leading the conversation towards, "Well you know with your philosophy on the kids being home with a parent verses in daycare" and I said, "Well of course, you know, we can have somebody home that's better than somebody else who may not care for our kids as much as we do" and (laughs) should have seen this coming, but I didn't. She says, "Well of the two of us, who has more patience?" I said, "Well that's me, of course." And she said, "Of...of the two of us, who has the higher earning potential?" and I said, "Well, you're an attorney. I'm an engineer. That's probably you." She said, "Okay so we're done?" And we weren't even married yet and I had basically committed to being the at home parent which I tell the story like I do because I wouldn't trade it for the world, you know. I think it's the greatest thing ever. I think it's made me a better person. It's certainly made me a better dad than I would have been had I been a working dad, and you know, in truth it's made me a better husband, so. I think it's a really, really, really good thing that we had that discussion.

Dalton's surprise around his decision to stay home highlights his initial reluctance to allow his female partner to have such power over the decision to stay home. His

partner's direct discussion of earning potential pointed out that Dalton was less likely to earn the majority of the money for their family and therefore should be the stay-at-home parent. Dalton's earning potential along with the power his partner exercised in the decision to stay home takes him by surprise because he is used to being the one in control. This is evident in the way he turns the conversation to why he chooses to tell the story this way and his love for being a stay-at-home father. By highlighting why he tells the story this way, he takes back his control over the situation and his role in the home as a stay-at-home father.

For the majority of fathers, economics and the desire to have someone at home with their children led to the decision to stay home; however, usually this decision was made after their children were conceived or born. Also for the majority of fathers, their time spent at home was constructed as temporary. Matthew, a father of three children, said "I - but over time I've kind of gotten used to the job, if you will and kind of enjoying life now and we live comfortably enough that I don't have to go back to work. But I probably will go back to work in a year when all the kids are in full-time school." While Matthew does not have a specific time he intends to go back to work, he assumes it will be once his children are in school full time. For Benjamin, going back to work was more immediate. He said, "We're going on vacation here next week and then when I get back I'll - I'll launch right into this new - this new chapter. So that'll be - that'll be in late April." The majority of fathers within this study mention similar sentiments about going back to work. Some had specific dates while others discuss going back to work after they felt they were not as needed at home.

A small minority of fathers discuss never going back to work. Staying at home was their job and they had no intentions of re-entering the workforce. When asked about his plans to return to work, Wyatt said,

It's basically open-ended we're - we are homeschooling our kids in addition to me being a stay-at-home dad and so I'm probably going to be the primary caregiver and stay at home dad until my youngest son goes to college which is another 16 years minimum. So yeah I'm probably not going to have another job ever which is odd to say.

Working outside the home is so engrained into our culture for both men and women that Wyatt is coming to terms with not returning to work. Similarly, Alex said, “I — I think I’m done with work, I think I’ll probably stay with her the whole time. Until she graduates high school, at least.” Both men do not intend to return to work after staying home with their children.

CONCLUSION

The decision to stay home for these fathers is often a personal decision influenced by multiple factors. For these fathers, both the financial sense of them being the one able to stay home and their desire to be with their children influenced their decision to stay home. Throughout these narratives around staying home are examples of how participants use power associated with notions of masculinities to construct their time at home in particular ways. Specifically, all fathers, regardless of the label they use for themselves, construct their time at home as a decision they made on their own or with their partners. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding their time at home, all participants construct being home as a choice highlighting how expectations of masculinities are very present in these fathers’ lives.

Fathers' participation in local or national stay-at-home father groups also highlight some of the ways participants construct their label as stay-at-home fathers and the desire to interact with other fathers. In addition, their experiences with or without other stay-at-home fathers impact the way they discuss resistance, the division of labor in their home and isolation.

Table 1. Participant Demographics by Organization Participation Group

	Participate in Both Local and National Organization N = 10 (25%)	Participate in Local Organizations Only N = 4 (10%)	Participate in National Organization Only N = 14 (35%)	Does not Participate in Organizations N = 12 (30%)
Average Age	40.6	37.3	39.6	35.9
Avg. Age at Birth of First Child	34.5	32.3	32.2	32
Identify as Stay-at-home Father				
Yes	10 (100%)	4 (100%)	14 (100%)	7 (58%)
No	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (42%)
Race				
Black	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
White	10 (100%)	4 (100%)	11 (79%)	12 (100%)
Latino	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Asian	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)
Home				
Rent	1 (10%)	1 (25%)	5 (36%)	2 (17%)
Own	6 (60%)	2 (50%)	9 (64%)	7 (58%)
Unknown	3 (30%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	3 (25%)
Education				
High School	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (8%)
Some College	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	5 (36%)	4 (33%)
Bachelor's	2 (20%)	4 (100%)	6 (43%)	4 (33%)
Degree	6 (60%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	1 (8%)
Master's Degree	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (17%)
PhD/JD				
Religion				
Protestant	5 (50%)	2 (50%)	3 (21%)	4 (33%)
Jewish	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	1 (8%)
Spiritual	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	1 (8%)
Non-Religious	1 (10%)	1 (25%)	3 (21%)	6 (50%)
Atheist	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)
Mormon	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)
Catholic	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)

CHAPTER 3

RESISTANCE

“You know there’s nothing more masculine than raising your kid.”

Otis, a father of two children from Seattle

In the lives of stay-at-home fathers, both resistance and compliance with traditional masculine expectations are present throughout their interactions with family, friends, other parents, and strangers. The quote above comes from a longer narrative where Otis discusses his interactions with his brother, who criticizes Otis for staying home with his children. Otis interrupts himself, responding in a way to his brother’s reactions by reframing care-giving as masculine. This exchange highlights the strain around hegemonic masculinities, identity, and care-giving. In this context, resistance is defined as the complicated moments of tension between rejecting traditional notions of gendered care-giving roles and participating in gendered assumptions about parenting (Medved 2009). There are several sites where these interactions create pressures for stay-at-home fathers as they care for their children within both public and private spaces. Specifically, resistance is present in conversations with professionals, like their children’s schools and doctors who assume that participants are not the main care-giver. These conversations create opportunities for fathers to challenge traditional expectations of fatherhood while sometimes quietly complying with social expectations. These moments result in several examples of resistance for participants within their daily lives.

The emphasis stay-at-home fathers place on being different from stay-at-home mothers allows participants to construct the role of stay-at-home fathers as separate from

stay-at-home mothers. I examine how fathers create a distinct identity associated with fatherhood and masculinities that is different from the stay-at-home mother role.

Through the creation of this separate identity, participants both resist traditional gendered expectations and create spaces to conform to these expectations. Participants do this through the rejection of feminine labels such as “Mr. Mom” or babysitter, feminine gendered roles, and female spaces. In their place, fathers create labels and spaces specifically for stay-at-home fathers. I analyze how these actions simultaneously challenge and affirm aspects of hegemonic masculinities. In addition, I examine how identity and access to power allow some fathers to resist these traditional expectations.

CONSTRUCTING FATHERHOOD

Many times throughout discussions with these stay-at-home fathers are instances where participants resist societal norms and pressures around their role as stay-at-home fathers while simultaneously participating in expectations of masculinities. Specifically for fathers who define themselves in opposition to mothers or stay-at-home mothers, this is a way for fathers to differentiate and possibly normalize what they are doing while also creating a more masculine space around a traditionally feminine role. Important for the context of resistance for the participants in this study are current theories around both hegemonic masculinities and access to power.

As discussed in previously, participants in this study are continuing to conform to some aspects of hegemonic masculinities while challenging others. Because participants in this study are all married to women and the majority identify as white, they have access to power associated with hegemonic masculinities. This access to power

associated with hegemonic masculinities allows participants to question their rejection from feminine spaces and to challenge labels such as ‘Mr. Mom.’” As a group comprised of mostly white men, participants enjoy racial and gender privilege within U.S. patriarchal society not available to everyone. Participants’ current social location as allows these men to challenge and resist gendered expectations associated with being a caregiver in ways that others cannot (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). This allows participants to resist and participate in traditional notions of parenting, highlighting how resistance can be complex and at times contradictory (Jurik, Cavender and Cowgill 2009). This section will address how access to power allows these fathers to challenge and conform to masculinities as stay-at-home fathers through resisting traditional gendered expectations.

Rejecting Feminine Roles

Participants discuss the ways they reject roles associated with being feminine despite participating in the main care-giving role, a traditionally feminine task. They continue to see themselves as masculine despite their role as the stay-at-home father. Throughout the interview process, there are several instances where participants express shock and anger in response to negative comments, specifically from other men. These negative comments from other men are attempts to regulate hegemonic masculinities for these fathers. Although negative responses are not new to most of these fathers, they continue to be surprised when faced with opposition. For the majority of fathers, these negative reactions may be the first time their masculinities or power have been questioned. Important in this discussion is the access to power these stay-at-home fathers

experiences based on their social location and status in society. As primarily middle-class, white, married men, these have access to power and social status that many men and women do not within the United States. As stay-at-home fathers, these men are sometimes challenged because they are participating in the traditionally feminine act of care-giving resulting in feelings of shock and surprise. This questioning and feelings of shock is exemplified in a story told by Mason, a father of two school-aged children.

So I'm at the soccer game, my son's soccer game, my daughter's beside me, there are mostly women around me with their kids. Every now and again a guy or two shows up. My son was done and I was packing up and two guys showed up behind me, lawn chairs with umbrellas and coolers, the whole thing. They were way more outfitted than anyone else there. They're seeing me pack up and when I see guys anywhere, the first thing I say is are you a full-time at-home dad? Because I not only want to know for me but want to let them know about the network. So I asked them and one Guy A, said "Oh no, I wish," but not in that way that he actually did. More like "I wish I had a cushy thing like that, so I wouldn't have to work." That was more, definitely what he meant. And Guy B said "No." So I said I'm a member of this network, thinking if I tell them that maybe a) it will raise awareness and b) maybe they know someone or will know someone. So Guy B says "Do you, like, do everything? Do you cook? Do you clean?" And I was like "Yeah, I do the whole ball of wax. That's what my job is." And he said, "Well, I would not let the women find out about that." And I'm thinking what he's about to follow that with is because then they'll make me do it or think I should be doing it or something like that. But his follow-up line was "That is really unattractive." I should not have been blindsided by that but that's sort of another example where I was like, 'Wow.'

In this experience, these two men suggest that Mason's role at home would make him unappealing to women. These men deem Mason unattractive to women for taking on roles that traditionally have been associated with women, such as cooking. In doing this, they continue to participate in the construction of hegemonic masculinities as both opposite and better than femininities. In addition, Mason's shocked reaction underscores the influence of hegemonic masculinities in his own life. As a white, married, middle-class man, he experiences power in ways that are not available to others including men of

color and women. Mason expects these fathers do not want other women to know about him because then they too will be expected to participate more in the care-giving in the home. He recognizes that care-giving is not normally associated with fatherhood or masculinities and expects to hear comments from other fathers. However, when these two men suggest Mason would be less attractive to women because he cares for his children, he is surprised. The questioning of his masculinity by these two men also challenges Mason's understanding of himself as masculine. Another participant, Logan, a father of twin girls, had a similar experience when caring for his girls at the playground.

The playground is across the street. The school with the playground is across street. The girls will be playing there so I'll run across to them and bring out the water. I'll have fresh cut watermelon or water or lemonade. I'll go ahead and bring out something. I get razzed for that. Like 'Oh, Mike, go whip something up or put on your apron.'

Similar to Mason, Logan's masculinity is questioned by other fathers because he was providing drinks for the children on the playground. In both of these narratives, there is a strain between traditional expectations for men and the expectations of the role of the stay-at-home parent. These fathers are ridiculed because of actions viewed as feminine. Lucas, a father of two children, also talks about reactions from other fathers.

You will go up to a few dads at the playground and asked them if they stay home or work from home to get them to try and join the group. One guy said I don't even understand why you would even do that. Other people flat out reject even the concept. Other guys have said things like, "Do you actually cook? Do you actually clean?"

As with Mason, these fathers are clearly questioning Lucas around his relationship to hegemonic masculinities. Negative reactions from other men bring to the forefront assumptions about masculinities and fatherhood. In addition, these reactions make fathers question the ways hegemonic masculinities are being constructed within their own

lives despite of their position as stay-at-home fathers. Benjamin, a father who participates in a local stay-at-home group, touches on his struggle with feeling masculine in this discussion about his brother.

I have another brother who is a much more of a...masculine, American type, you know, football loving. Gotta be the bread winner. He's driving a truck, you know, born country kind of guy - kind of guy. I think that, you know, he's the one who told me - he's like, "I can't imagine ever doing this, it just freaks me out just thinking about it" and I think that in-intellectually he understands it and supports me but, you know, he - and he has - he has a - his partner is a stay-at-home mom. You know, he's very comfortable with that but I don't think that um (pause) there's a whole lot of pride, you know, in like saying that his brother is a stay-at-home dad.

All four of these examples highlight the complexities around masculinities. Benjamin's quote focusing on his brother's feelings around him staying home exemplifies some of the reactions these fathers have faced from other men. Although he does not say that it challenges his sense of masculinity, his brother's lack of pride in Benjamin suggests that staying home is not viewed as a positive role. All four of these fathers show how other men question these father's masculinities because of their role as care-givers.

Participants were not backing away the from traditionally famine role; however, they were challenged by others because of their association with feminine tasks.

Participants also discuss labels like "Mr. Mom," as a way others regulate their role within the home and masculinities. Rather than just discussing these labels as they do with other reactions, fathers discussed their strong dislike for terms that associated them with mothers. Fathers' dislike for terms like "Mr. Mom" is a way these fathers are attempting to set themselves apart from both femininity and motherhood.

Mr. Mom

One way fathers explicitly define themselves as different from mothers was through the rejection of the label “Mr. Mom.” The term “Mr. Mom” gained popularity after the 1983 movie titled “Mr. Mom,” starring Michael Keaton as a father who recently lost his job and is now faced with caring for his children and the household chores while his wife works outside the home. Throughout the movie, he stumbles through different tasks that have traditionally been associated with mothers. The focus of the humor in the movie is from his difficulties as he tries to take on this traditionally feminine role (IMBd 2014). Implicit in this example of a father staying home with his children is that it is abnormal and against the traditional role associated with fathers. The label “Mr. Mom” is also defined by common expectations of motherhood. In recent years, intensive mothering has become a dominant form of mothering (Christopher 2012). Intensive mothering includes “mandates for dedicated one-on-one mother time, careful choice of correct ‘alternative mothers,’ the expression of powerful, sacrificial love for children and a focus on children’s desires and developmental needs guided by experts and financial resources,” (Medved 2009:144). Stay-at-home fathers who are labeled “Mr. Mom,” then confront these expectations around intensive mothering as well. By rejecting the term, “Mr. Mom,” fathers suggest that they should not be considered mothers and are not mothering their children. Over thirty years after the release of the movie, the term “Mr. Mom” is still commonly associated with fathers who stay at home with their children.

In interviews with stay-at-home fathers, the dislike for the term “Mr. Mom” is discussed repeatedly. Participants talk about being called “Mr. Mom” by acquaintances, friends, and strangers at the grocery store. When asked about reactions from others,

Liam, a father of six children, said, “You still get the ‘Mr. Mom’ comments. No, not so much. Actually, I’m a dad. I don’t try to be Mom.” Here he suggests that there are distinct differences between his role as a father and the role of mothers. Similarly, Noah, the father of a son, explains the reasons behind his rejection of the “Mr. Mom” label:

That’s why stay-at-home dads are against being called ‘Mr. Mom.’ You may have heard that we hate that term. And some people will never think about it, about the fact that when you are calling a stay-at-home dad ‘Mr. Mom,’ you are saying that they are doing a woman’s work. We don’t use terms associated back to women. We don’t say, ‘Oh, Mrs. Dad.’ You’d be very quickly called out if someone was, you know, was saying a woman working wasn’t her place. Whereas if the man is not working, we sort of automatically feminize him. That bothers us.

Here, Noah explicitly states that his reason for rejecting the term is because he sees it as feminizing. Both Noah and Liam separate themselves from the feminine role of mothering and by doing this, suggest that they are participating in a role that is specifically masculine. In addition, the term “Mr. Mom” is seen as an insult because of its association with women and femininities. Ethan, a stay-at-home father for 12 years to three children exemplifies this when he says,

When I first started staying home, people were like ‘Oh, you’re just Mr. Mom. When are you going to get a job?’ or ‘What do you really do?’ They weren’t very understanding of what it is. It’s partly a cultural thing, I think.

Again, the term “Mr. Mom” is used to regulate the masculinities of these fathers as they participate in a traditionally feminine role as the stay-at-home parent. The rejection of this term by these fathers suggests that they too see it as a negative label. Ethan goes on to talk about his interactions with reporters around his experiences as a stay-at-home father.

I say this all the time to reporters. Turn around anything you’re thinking about and say the same kind of thing about a woman that you’re going to say about me. Then ask yourself, if you would get fired for that. Like, would you ever say in an

article about my wife that she is a Mr. Dad? Because she is a woman who's working? No, you would never say that. So why would you call me Mr. Mom?"

Ethan suggests that he should be treated similarly to his wife in the workforce. Missing from his discussion are the implicit expectations on women to act masculine in the workforce in order to not be seen as weak or incompetent (Rutherford 2014). Also missing from fathers' discussions and frustrations with the term "Mr. Mom" is the recognition that by rejecting this term, these fathers are participating in furthering the power associated with masculinities. As within the workforce, these fathers see being associated with this feminine, mothering role as weak. By rejecting this term, they suggest being called "Mom" is undesirable.

Overall, these fathers continue to reject the term "Mr. Mom" and the feminine expectations that come with the term. By rejecting what is considered feminine about this role, these fathers are attempting to reconstruct the role of the stay-at-home father as masculine. Rather than suggesting that parenting is not gendered, these fathers are attempting to show that what they do as care-givers is masculine. They are continuing to affirm a gendered binary within parenting by creating a role that is specifically for fathers. In addition to rejecting this term associated with mothering, fathers also suggest that it is important to create spaces that are specifically for stay-at-home fathers. In doing this, they suggest that stay-at-home fathers are different and perhaps in some circumstances, better than stay-at-home mothers.

Mom "Spaces"

Another aspect stay-at-home fathers discuss is their acceptance and participation in parent-child groups consisting of mostly mothers. Fathers have varied experiences

with stay-at-home mother groups including feeling welcomed by everyone, continuing to participate despite feelings of being rejected by some of the mothers in the group, and feeling completely rejected and not participating in these groups. The ways these fathers talk about these experiences highlight their experiences with stay-at-home mothers, expectations mothers have for these stay-at-home fathers, and the ways in which these fathers reject societal expectations placed on them because of their status as stay-at-home fathers.

Sebastian, a father to two children, ages 3 and 7 months, talks about his experiences with other stay-at-home mothers as positive and encouraging. Throughout his time at home with both of his children, he has experienced several different groups including groups geared at play as well as for learning Spanish for children. Sebastian characterizes his experiences in these groups as positive and inviting. He states,

The moms have just you know I've been in various mom groups and mixed groups and (pause) everyone has been very welcoming in - in that it's - it's not always 100 percent comfortable for everybody but it's - but it's, but there's - there's genuine... I don't know, there's been a genuine acceptance. I really have - actually I've had a lot of women and men say to me "oh you're really lucky" and uh "I would do that if I could" or "I wish I could do that" ...

One of the groups he participated in was for newborns. Although he was the only man in the group, he speaks highly of his time spent part of the group and mentioned that he continues to spend time with these mothers. Sebastian's positive experiences with these mothers speaks to both his comfort in his role as well as the reactions to his position as a stay-at-home father.

Despite speaking highly of his experiences and acceptances with other stay-at-home mothers, he also talks about not always feeling “100% comfortable” in these group settings.

I mean there's - there's certain conversations that would take place that I could participate sometimes via my wife's experience, presenting that, or - I mean one - the - eventually in the first 4 months it was really like a get together and like talk and, you know, digest what your 6 week old was doing or, you know, 2 month old and how to deal with getting them to sleep or, it was all that kind of stuff. Just kind of vent a little bit and get some tips from other people and maybe give out a tip or two. Then it morphed into the play group but I would say...you know...you know, it - so the only thing that - that - 2 things that were like um where I really felt like "Okay, I'm - I'm the only guy here." Some of the conversations where there was - really kind of on feminine things. I mean, nursing - I've got a - whatever, whatever that happens to you - but, you know, or - or, I don't know, you can - I can't remember what they were but just nursing - I think just nursing itself and I was like, "Okay, I'm trying to be respectful here." We navigated that fairly well but I mean honest - to be frank that was certainly...not the most comfortable experience probably for...anybody. It was a little bit...in fact, you know, if there were - if it were...because I was - I think it was exacerbated by being the only male in the room. If it were like, you know, a group of 15 people and it was, you know, 8 and 7 or 7 and 8 or whatever, I mean um it wasn't a bit - I mean but - but kind of those kinds of things but other than that and - and I mean and that wasn't like that dramatic or anything it's just a little bit, yeah, it's a little bit different for - I mean and, you know...everybody survived including me, so.

In this narrative, Sebastian describes the awkwardness he felt when discussions turned to topics such as breast feeding in the all mothers' group. As evidenced through the way he stumbles through describing his experience, these conversations were awkward for both him and the mothers participating in the group even though he personally experienced many of the same issues these women were talking about with his female partner.

Although he has had second-hand experience with topics like breastfeeding via his wife, he does not have the embodied experiences that these women have experienced. By acknowledging the awkwardness of his presence during these discussions, Sebastian also is forced to acknowledge his differences in this group made of primarily women. He

recognizes that this space may not be a welcome space for him at all times but is aware of his own power in the situation by attempting to respect the women's need to discuss these personal topics. Casper, a father of one son, also talks about his experience with stay-at-home mothers while talking about personal aspects of breast feeding or child birth.

Casper's experiences with these groups, however, vary greatly from Sebastian's. Rather than being accepting, the mother's group that Casper had joined informed him that he would not be able to participate because of the personal nature of their conversations.

When describing this situation he stated,

I tried to join a local playgroup online, they were like it's only for women because we talk about vaginas. That was like are you kidding me? I got an e-mail that said we can't let you in the group because sometimes we talk about lady things and lady parts. And I was like, "I know what they are. I have a child so obviously I know they are." But that's the dumbest thing ever heard, this is playgroup.

Different from Sebastian, Casper was unaware of his position within the group. Similar to Sebastian, he has experiences with breastfeeding and childbirth via his wife's experiences but not embodied experiences like these women. Casper, similar to most men in this group of fathers, has not been excluded from most groups because of his privileged position in the patriarchal society of the U.S. His reactions highlight this surprise and shock of being challenged.

Both men tried to participate in stay-at-home mother groups and both experienced discussions around breast-feeding and child birth. However, they were received differently and had very different reactions to their experiences. Sebastian, although awkward describing his interactions with the women when discussing female bodily functions, attempts to give them space and was concerned about respecting their discussions. Casper, however, was rejected from the group because of their

conversations. He reacts out of surprise and dismissal of the group's concern. His statement, "This is the dumbest thing I have ever heard," attempts to turn his surprise at being rejected from the group into dismissing the women's concerns as unreasonable and "dumb." Both men's reactions highlight masculine expressions in different ways. Sebastian's discomfort with the discussions suggest that he himself felt like an outsider or in some way was not supposed to be part of the discussions because he was a man. His awkwardness around the discussions set him apart from his female counterparts and suggest that he sees himself as different from these mothers. Casper's reaction to discussions around female bodily functions and being left out of the group because of his status as a man left him frustrated. Later in his interview, he talks about starting a stay-at-home father group in order to counteract this rejection. Casper also was singled out because he was not a mother. His reaction suggested that he thought that the women who voiced their concerns were unfounded and being "ridiculous." Rather than thinking about their concerns or feelings, he reacted in a way that questioned their saneness.

Other men talked about feeling comfortable in some situations but not in larger groups of stay-at-home mothers. George relies heavily on other stay-at-home mothers in his friends group. He stated, "As far as support system goes, I have...a couple of friends they're - they're high school friends who are all - became stay at home moms. And...You know, we have play dates kind of once a week and rely on each other a little bit when something goes wrong and we need an extra hand." However, when trying to join a larger stay-at-home mother group, he was met with opposition.

There have been a couple of times where I've tried to become a part of a larger stay at home mom network kind of on Facebook or stuff where they have play dates and that sort of thing and I've kind of given up on those because they

generally end up pretty awkward. I feel like the moms don't know how to connect with me. We have trouble finding things to talk about.

While the mothers in his small group are accepting, he finds it hard to connect with other stay-at-home mothers. One difference between his small group of stay-at-home mother friends and larger groups of stay-at-home mothers is his relationship with the smaller group. Rather than meeting these stay-at-home mothers as a stay-at-home father himself, like with the larger group of stay-at-home mothers, these are friends from high school. These friends have known each other before having children and most likely before getting married or having careers. The association with this small group of mothers is more than finding commonality around staying home. Because of this relationship, George's comfort may not be associated with some stay-at-home mothers but not all. Instead, this small group of women happen to be stay-at-home mothers but their friendship is not based on that alone. Again, George, similarly to Sebastian and Casper, felt that he was different than the other mothers and had less in common with them, despite being a stay-at-home parent. Even though these fathers are caring for their children much in the same way the mothers in these groups are doing, both mothers and fathers set these men apart because they are men.

While several men spoke about attempting to participate in some groups mostly made up of stay-at-home mothers, several other fathers talk about their dislike for these mothers' groups. Fathers cite multiple reasons for avoiding these stay-at-mother groups including not feeling accepted by other mothers, feeling more comfortable with other fathers, or wanting to focus on conversations that mothers do not. Several fathers talk about not feeling accepted by other mother groups. As Casper and George discuss, many

times the spaces created for mothers were not as open to men. Noah, the father of a five-year-old boy, also points out how language can create spaces intended for parents feel like they are mother-exclusive. Citing his church parent group as an example, he talks about the parent/child gym time at his church as being labeled a “Mommy and Me” group. When asking about being able to attend, his pastor was shocked that he wouldn’t think he would be accepted because the group was intended to be for all stay-at-home parents. Noah had to point out that as a father, it was unclear whether he was allowed to participate, despite being a stay-at-home parent. By pointing out the word choice, Noah was able to show how his presence as a man in these groups was not always encouraged or welcomed.

Other fathers focus on participating in groups that were only for stay-at-home fathers. When talking about their interaction with these other fathers, Kevin, a father of two elementary school aged children, talks about his interactions with both stay-at-home mothers and stay-at-home fathers.

Well everybody kind of ends up being a stay-at-home dad for very different reasons. Most often it’s because of a career stall or layoff or a job change that didn’t work out or they are underemployed or unemployed and it becomes this default role. It’s not one that they choose to do because they feel very strongly about being a parent. It’s like everything else in life, when you go into something, ass-backwards, by default, you’re going to be lousy at it and you don’t approach it with a real commitment to doing it right or well. So for the most part, I saw that in a lot of stay-at-home dads around me. But I also saw it, to an even greater extent, in a lot of stay-at-home moms. It was interesting that the roles were, there were a lot of similarity between how dads and moms struggle with not working, not being part of productive America, not being a part of adult life but they handled it very differently. I think that ultimately, men, because they are so much more independent and private, they end up internalizing it and they become, they just become depressed and disconnected. Women reach out to other women to find some commonality. So there will be play groups that are generated by stay-at-home moms but stay-at-home dads don’t do that. Or they try to do it because it seems like the way to handle the issues that they are facing but it

doesn't quite work well unless they become friends very quickly and they can bond around something that is very guy orientated, like sports for example. Play dates with guys with young kids very quickly start looking like Monday night football and the kids very quickly are left to their own devices and the parenting kind of goes out of the window.

He suggests that both women and men struggle with some of the same issues, including grappling with not contributing financially to their families or the working world.

However, he proposes that there are differences between the ways that fathers grapple with these issues. He suggests that, without knowing other stay-at-home fathers in similar situations, men tend to struggle with being disconnected and depressed. He further criticizes fathers for focusing too much on themselves and less on their children within these groups. In this example, Kevin points out that many times fathers are looking for more of a connection with other fathers in a similar position and may not put their children's needs first. In the end, he suggests that because he chose to stay at home with his children and does not focus on the interaction aspect that many mothers and fathers need, he is able to better parent his children than both stay-at-home mothers and stay-at-home fathers.

Fathers talk about their experiences with stay-at-home mother groups and mother-centered spaces in slightly different ways. However, the majority of fathers highlight their feelings of discomfort and frustrations with being excluded from these spaces. Their reactions to being left out or choosing to not participate in these spaces help construct the stay-at-home father role as separate from the role of stay-at-home mothers. Their frustrations associated with being left out of these groups also highlights the tensions associated with being in this role and the power most of these men feel being associated with masculinities. Not being accepted into these spaces may be the first time

these fathers have felt discomfort in a group setting because of their gender and many react by dismissing the concerns of the women in these spaces, highlighting their power and the tensions when this power is questioned.

REACTING

In the lives of stay-at-home fathers, tensions and resistance are present in conversations with others, like their children's schools and doctors, who assume that participants are not the main care-giver when they interact with fathers. Rather, these professionals tend to ask for the children's mothers, making assumptions around who is the main care-giver within the family. These assumptions help reinforce traditional gendered roles around care-giving and who is responsible for the care of children. In addition, by not acknowledging these fathers as primary care-givers, they are automatically left out of their children's care. These gendered roles for both mothers and fathers are evident in discussions fathers have with teachers, doctors, and other professionals interacting with their children.

Isaac, a father of two from Kansas, experienced this both with doctors and teachers at his son's school. When their son was first born, he and his wife would attend doctor's appointments together. Although they were both in the room and cared for their son, nurses and doctors would direct their instructions toward his wife. While he did not say anything in the moment, he did express frustration about the assumptions by these doctors. In addition, he cites situations when at grocery stores or out and about when people assume he is just "babysitting" his children.

When we are out and about, just running errands, like at Target, I still take the kids while my wife shops, when they see us, they come up at talk to us and say,

“Oh you’re watching the kids while your wife shops?” You know, sometimes I mention that I’m the one.

While he does not always correct everyone who makes these assumptions, he does correct people who he interacts with on a daily basis.

When we get to play groups when I am sure that I am going to run into them again, I try to make a point to tell them that I am a stay-at-home dad and not just watching the kids. I’m the parent. There is a stay-at-home dad Facebook page I follow. One of his things was “Don’t call me Mr. Mom.” Stay-at-home dad is okay but how about just dad? Yeah, I’m the father of my kids and I’m taking care of them.

He is clear that he is not “Mr. Mom” or babysitting. Rather he is the father of his children and wants to be recognized in that way. While he is not concerned with how he looked to strangers in the store, he does want those who know him to not assume that he was only temporarily taking care of his children. Isaac, along with other fathers, expresses apathy to some comments while correcting others, depending on the situation. By correcting those in his play groups and at school, Isaac resists traditional expectations of fathers and asserts his role as the main care-giver.

However, Isaac is not the only one in his family to experience gendered assumptions by professionals associated with their children. He also shares a story about his wife’s experiences and guilt around not knowing the daily interactions of their children. He said,

Occasionally, at the day school, my wife will have to drop them off at the day school. She says she feels really bad when the parents ask her or the moms ask her questions about the kids and she can’t answer them. She said, “Don’t do that to me again. Tell me every single thing.”

While he is taking care of everything associated with the children, his wife still feels responsible for knowing their daily schedules because of the social assumptions that she should be intimately involved in their daily actions as the mother. In both of these

situations, Isaac and his wife struggle with gendered notions of care-giving; however, both react differently. Isaac corrects those he interacts with on a regular basis, asserting himself as the care-giver and father. In comparison, his wife internalizes the guilt associated with not knowing her children's schedule and attempts to fix the situation by being more aware of their schedule in the future.

Fathers also talk about the reactions of their friends and family to their decision to stay home and care for their children. Some fathers focus on the positive reactions they receive from their family and friends. Dalton, when talking about his mother, speaks of her support and encouragement as he cares for his children. He says, "All in all I've - the people whose opinion I care most about have been supportive." Charlie, a father of three children under ten, also feels supported by his family and close friends. Although he lives in a primarily manufacturing town, he feels that his community has come to accept him as a stay-at-home father. When talking about that transition, he said

When we first moved to our community here a stay at home dad is something that really wasn't done, there's a bunch of stay at home moms because it's a very...manufacturing sort of town. There's a Ford plant here. There's a Dana Industrial plant here. A lot of warehouse jobs so a lot of the men do those jobs and work and the moms - and the moms are the ones that stay home. So having somebody stay home being the dad was kind of a foreign concept to them. But since they've figured out that, you know, I just don't stay at home and play video games all day, that I actually do parenting stuff they like - they're - they've really come around to it, so um, they've really come around to being supportive of what I do and some of them wish they could do it.

Charlie had to prove that he was taking care of the children and focused on being a care-giver rather than lazy in order to get the support of his community. The assumption that he was lazy or not taking care of his kids when at home follows traditional expectations around fathers and providing for the family. Traditionally, men who are unable or

unwilling to work outside the home are seen as lazy and failing to provide for their family. However, women who are staying home are not questioned to the same extent. In fact, often it is assumed that if a woman is staying home, it is a deliberate choice to care for her children. In this situation, Charlie is forced to prove his status as a stay-at-home father before being accepted by the community.

Another father, Owen, talks about being accepted on the surface by his family and friends but continues to feel uncomfortable with one of his friends. Although this close friend says he is comfortable with the idea of Owen staying home, he does not know how to relate to him now that he does not participate in the workforce. A similar incident happened to Brent when on the bus with his family in San Francisco. While his wife and children were talking about the football game they recently attended, Brent was listening to a conversation with three men on the bus. When talking about families and working, one man leaned over to Brent and made a joke about why they, being the men in the conversation including Brent, work to provide for their families. The attempt was to help include Brent into the conversation around work that the other men were having but Brent responded by explaining he actually does not work outside the home but instead cares for his children. The man who leaned over to include him in the conversation did not respond and the entire group stopped talking with Brent. In this situation, because the roles for men and women within the family are so ingrained, these men felt comfortable assuming that Brent worked outside the home to provide for the family. When they found out that this was not the case, they had no response. Instead, this revelation stopped the conversation entirely. While retelling this story, Brent did not seem bothered

by the situation but was surprised by the continued lack of understanding by others, especially men.

Understanding Gendered Roles

Throughout conversations with participants about their role as a stay-at-home fathers and the reactions by others, the concept of gender and gendered roles continued to be a topic of discussion. Several fathers recount instances where gender created both favorable and negative experiences. Many times fathers are not fully aware of the ways that they are both resisting and conforming to gendered norms at the same time. One instance comes from a story from Charlie around his experiences volunteering in his child's school. At first teachers were skeptical of his role at home and in the classroom; however, he soon became favored by both the teachers and principal. By volunteering in his child's classroom, he feels like he was pushing the boundaries of what was normally expected by fathers and teachers' initial resistance to his presence confirmed this.

However, he goes on to talk about how both teachers and the principal began to accept his presence in the classroom and even preferred it to other mothers.

The principal said, you know, I've volunteered before, of course, and the principal said "Pretty much anything you volunteer for at this school you will be selected because there isn't hardly any male chaperones that we have to choose from." And they - and they said a lot of the teachers even said - my child's teachers - that they would of course assign my child with me but other kids in the group would be the more rambunctious ones - not necessarily the trouble makers but the more rambunctious ones, the ones that have a hard time listening sometimes and they've noticed that for me they do listen and teachers said the only thing that they can figure to attribute that to would be having a male role model or a male pre-presence there. So I mean I don't think it's anything sexist about it, it's just that...that particular child's home life, the male is the authority figure. It's the only - it's the only thing they can really figure that to because the teachers have done it till they're blue in the face and the poor teachers - and they're female teachers, of course, the poor teachers are at their wit's end with it so any time that I have the

opportunity to come in, they have me come in and then they say, you know, that - that particular child...it's like night and day.

Charlie points to very specific ways that he was favored and given more authority because he is a man. Because there are few male teachers at his child's school, his role as a male figure in the classroom and on field trips is given more authority than the female teachers. By encouraging Charlie and giving him this authority role, the teachers are participating in affirming these traditional gendered roles. Also, despite not believing that what was happening was sexist, he goes on to refer to the "poor teachers," as "female teachers, of course." While Charlie feels that he is breaking certain gendered norms as a stay-at-home father, he also continues to participate and reaffirm traditional notions of power between men and women. As the only father volunteering, his social location sets him apart from the other volunteers, elevating him to a position of power regardless of his experience with children.

Other fathers participating in this study discussed the tensions of resisting traditional gendered roles while also participating in other aspects of hegemonic masculinities. Several fathers talked about the tensions they felt around fully identifying as a stay-at-home father in all circumstances. Many participants talked about how in some circles they would identify as stay-at-home fathers however, when around other men who work outside the home, they would talk about hobbies or what they used to do for work in order to fit in. Sebastian explains that while he is "a full time dad," he "would probably have an aside that would say I have my hand in a couple of other things on the side but my primary responsibility is to take care of my children." While he acknowledges his responsibility at home, he also recognizes his struggle to be seen as *just*

a stay-at-home father. Benjamin, a stay-at-home father active in a local group who will soon be transitioning into working outside the home discusses the tensions and complications he has felt around being a stay-at-home father and his own understanding of masculinities.

Yeah, yeah, I mean I - it's definitely a struggle with them, you know, there's, you know, when you tell somebody out in society that you don't know. They want to ask you what you do and you're like "oh, I stay at home with my son." You know, there's definitely like a little bit of shame deep down inside (laughs). Even today when I'm - I can say "yeah, I'm a stay-at-home dad but I also do all these other things in addition to being a stay at home dad that is - you know, running this group" and so on and so forth but even still have that a little bit of like...slight tinge of shame. It's definitely one of those things, you know, and - and uh having to like accept the identity of being a stay-at-home dad or domesticated caretaker. It's something that you - that I struggled with um, you know, for the first year and a half and I had to ultimately just chuck it out the door and just say you know what, I - I have to like - I just have to like be vulnerable and let it just give into it, it's okay, I'm just not going to be happy until I do that. I'm just going to have an issue with myself. So I decided to check my masculinity and find other ways to - to identify as masculine. Um, and basically create - I think it's kind of like a - a creation game, you just kind of have to like in your own head - in my own head I had to like say, you know what it is masculine to be at home with my child. It's in the subtleties that masculinity lies, in the subtleties. So I'm choosing to parent my child in different ways than moms would choose to parent their child for the - for the most part, so I - I'm okay with walking away from son at the playground and letting him kind of get dirty, you know, and just kind of watching him from a far and explore a little bit and maybe tumble and fall and skin his knee and hurt himself and - and coach him through that pain and that situation different with - with, you know, a valid and respectable amount of, you know, emotional connection that a mom would have, but in a different way. And I identify that as being masculine.

Benjamin touches on several tensions surrounding what it means to be masculine and how his identity influences not only how others see him but how he constructs his own identity. By being at home, he struggles with shame associated with not providing for his family. In many ways he compensates for this by creating a local stay-at-home group and spending time helping other fathers with similar struggles to his own. He also

specifically shows how his construction of the stay-at-home father is different from what is expected from stay-at-home mothers by letting his children get dirty and even get hurt. By doing this he is setting himself apart as a stay-at-home father as well as suggesting that what he does, he does better than mothers. The tensions around masculinities for these fathers many times results in suggesting that what they are doing as stay-at-home fathers is better than what stay-at-home mothers do for their children.

CONCLUSION

Fathers throughout this study use multiple avenues to talk about the ways they resist traditional gendered roles. They do this through creating spaces specific to stay-at-home fathers as well as responding to traditional expectations of gendered parent roles by correcting others. However, in many ways these fathers also continue to participate in these traditional expectations of masculinities by not only separating themselves from mothers but creating a role that is both masculine and in some ways constructed as superior to the role of mothers. Not only does this help fathers create this new role for themselves, it highlights how fathers are using privilege and power associated with being masculine to help construct this role for stay-at-home fathers. As mentioned before, for many fathers, these situations are one of the first times that they have not been welcomed into a group because of their gender. Reactions of shock as well as dismissal of the concerns of mothers show how in many ways, these fathers still have much of the power associated with being masculine. Also, many times by not responding or constructing their role at home as staying home but also participating in other masculine activities, these fathers continue to conform to traditional masculine roles. Overall, while these

fathers are attempting to change traditional gendered roles associated with care-giving, in many ways they continue to reinforce traditional expectations of masculinities and power.

CHAPTER 4

THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR

The topic of the division of household labor is an area rich with discussions around gender for stay-at-home fathers and their families. Although almost all participants claim to contribute a larger portion of the household labor, gendered divisions are still apparent in the types of household work fathers refuse to do or leave for their partners. Throughout their discussions of who does the laundry, how they manage household tasks, and how little their partners help with the cooking, these fathers both broke traditional gendered roles around the division of household labor while at the same time reaffirming gendered roles. Most fathers, if outdoor work was discussed, mention that they were also in charge of cutting the grass and raking the leaves. Another popular gendered topic was laundry and the inability to wash women's clothes. Both of these examples as well as others highlight the ways these fathers are both participating in and countering traditionally gendered household tasks. Throughout these conversations, fathers also focus on the tensions around the division of household labor within their families, their partnerships, and themselves as they continue in their role as a stay-at-home father. This chapter will address the research question: Is the negotiation of household labor in these families, including care work and household tasks, a reflection of shifting gender roles in the home where the primary caregiver is the father?

For most families, the division of household labor and child care is a continual negotiation of roles and expectations that are influenced by many factors including relationships to outside work, religion, and society. Societal expectations of fathers as

breadwinners and mothers as care-givers continue to influence the ways families negotiate the division of household labor. The more husbands depend on their wives for financial support, the less household labor they do within the home (Brines 1994). These husbands thus do gender by rejecting feminine roles within the home while continuing to rely on their wives for financial support. They thus maintain their access to masculine ideals even if they are unable to be the sole breadwinner.

Within this study, household labor is defined as the unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or the home within couples (John, Shelton and Luschen 1995). Different from previous research, participants in this study take on the majority of household labor, participating in tasks that are traditionally feminine. The ways these fathers talk about the tasks they manage and the rejection of other tasks highlight how these fathers are constructing their role as a stay-at-home father. In addition, by specifically looking at what and how much household labor these fathers are responsible for, I show how household labor is a site of both rejection and participation in traditional notions of masculinities.

This chapter addresses the amount of household labor these fathers manage in comparison to their female partners. I also analyze the types of tasks fathers discuss managing and how these tasks relate both to gender and power. In addition, this chapter addresses the types of tasks fathers refuse to participate in and their feelings toward their partner's contribution to the household labor. Both of these aspects are important in examining how household labor contributes to the construction of hegemonic masculinities for these fathers. Finally, the tensions and feelings around the division of

household labor is examined in order to understand how these fathers and families manage the household labor.

HOW MUCH HOUSEWORK DO FATHERS DO?

This study asked participants to estimate the percent of the total household labor they typically do within a week. In addition, it asks them what percent of the total household labor their partner manages. Participants typically estimated they manage 65-90 percent of the household labor with their partners taking on between 10 and 35 percent of the household labor. On average, fathers participate in 72 percent of the household labor while their partners were responsible for 28 percent. Household labor includes several aspects of household cleaning, maintenance, and budgeting. However, some participants also pay for housecleaning or yard maintenance services. Even when this was the case, fathers did not take into consideration the paid household labor as part of the division of work between themselves and their partners. Rather than asking participants' partners and others in their lives to help verify the amount of time spend on household labor, I am interested in how these fathers view their participation in household labor. By focusing on what fathers contribute to the home and how much time they estimate they spend on the household labor, I can better understand how they construct their own identities as a stay-at-home father.

Uncommon in the discussion of the division of household labor was the way Wyatt, a father of two young, preschool aged children described how he and his wife divided the household labor. When asked who took care of more of the household

chores, he replies by giving a detailed description of how each chore is actually split between the two of them. He says,

It's usually pretty simple. I cook breakfast and my wife cooks all the other meals. I do the dishes, and keep the kitchen otherwise clean. We do the laundry together because otherwise it would not get done because we both hate folding clothes. Then I typically do the vacuuming and about half the sweeping up and then my wife does the mopping and the other half of the sweeping up.

The way he describes the chores in his family, suggests that they have not struggled to come to a routine and that while he's at home, caring for their children, they continue to split the household tasks equally. Wyatt insists that he and his wife split yard work, which is traditionally left for men, equally. He states,

We trade off mowing the lawn. We don't really rake that much, I mean we only rake like 2 or 3 times a year and then we have a 2 story house and don't have an extension ladder, so we have to hire people to do the gutters. We walk the dog every day together.

While this does not take into account Wyatt's wife's description of the division of the household labor, it does highlight how he and his partner divide even the outdoor labor unlike many of the participants in this study.

A more common response from fathers to the question of who takes care of the household tasks was similar to Alan's response, "Oh, golly, I do all of it that I can. But overall, I try to do it all because it's my job. It's not going to last forever." Alan, a father of preschool children, described the household labor as his job in the home. Because he is not working outside the home, he views the household labor as his responsibility. Although taking this on now, his assertion that it will last suggest that he is not fully comfortable being responsible for the majority of the household labor. Sean mirrors these sentiments when he responds,

Well mainly, I pretty much do everything. I do all of the cooking and all of the cleaning, all the laundry, all the dishes, you know, all the routine maintenance. There really isn't anything that I don't do.

While Sean is responsible for most of the household labor, he later mentions that he and his wife also pay for cleaning help and a nanny. Both of these examples show the different ways fathers construct what it means for them to take care of the household labor. Alan does the majority of the household labor himself, including cleaning; however, he views it as a temporary situation. Sean manages the household by taking on the responsibility for the laundry and cooking, however, he also helps arrange for cleaning help. In both cases, these fathers view household labor as either temporary or not fully their responsibility. Below, I examine how fathers discuss different types of household labor including, cleaning, cooking, laundry, and household maintenance as a reflection of tensions associated with hegemonic masculinities.

TYPES OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR

The types of household labor that fathers focus on during interviews highlights how these fathers define what household labor means to them. When asked to talk about household labor, fathers talk about four types of household tasks: cooking and cleaning the kitchen, laundry, household maintenance, and the budget. In previous literature (Bartley, Blanton and Gilliard 2005; Kamo 2000), stay-at-home mothers focus their attention on managing care-giving activities, including cooking and cleaning the home. In comparison, these fathers separate their household work from the care-giving tasks. Also, while almost all fathers in this study manage the majority of the household labor, they rarely talk about the actual cleaning of the home. Rather they talk about managing

the cooking, laundry, household maintenance, and the budget. The ways these fathers define household labor reflects how they are defining their role as the stay-at-home father distinct from what is expected of mothers.

Laundry

One task that was brought up several times throughout the interviews was laundry. Many times fathers use laundry as a way to describe how household labor was divided within their home and highlight the tensions surrounding these divisions. Laundry became a site for gendered divisions in many ways. Participants' perceived lack of skill and disinterest in washing clothes, particularly their wife's clothes, was an interesting site for fathers to reject this traditionally feminine task. Carl, a father to a daughter under one-year old who quit his position as a tenured professor to stay home with his daughter highlights both the tension around the task of laundry as well as how it has become a gendered task in his home. He stated,

So - so the housework has been something that we've really had to talk about like, you know, I do my own laundry. I'm like if you want your laundry done, you're going to do your own laundry. I'm not going to do your laundry, besides I always screw it up anyway.

At first, Carl's reaction around laundry seems to focus on splitting the tasks equally or at least based on what each person requires to have their own clothes cleaned. However, he prefaces his discussion by talking about the tension associated with deciding who does what in their household. Further in his discussion, Carl continues to talk about the tensions associated with deciding how to divide not only the laundry but other tasks as well. By suggesting that she should do her own laundry, he implies that this may not be

what his wife would like; however, he also dismisses this by suggesting that he would “screw it up, anyway.” Oscar, a father of two children also makes a similar comment around his ability to do his wife’s laundry. He says,

But my wife still does the laundry because she doesn't like me touching the laundry because she has work stuff in it that is delicate or like, you know, wool or things that can't be dried and, you know, I don't.

In both of these examples men cite the inability to wash clothes, particularly clothing deemed feminine. Oscar laughs after talking about his wife’s clothes compared to his own, suggesting that by having clothes that cannot be dried or should be treated delicately in the wash is somehow not masculine. In both of these examples, the rejection of participating in doing the laundry shows how these men continue to support traditional expectations of hegemonic masculinities. Their decision to not take care of the laundry also highlights the power dynamics at work within these families.

Participants who did take some of the responsibility of the laundry focus on doing only their laundry or a small portion of the family laundry. Overall, their female partners are responsible for the majority of the laundry in the home, including their children’s laundry. Although these fathers are staying home, they are able to negotiate out of doing their partner’s laundry or all of the laundry because of their position as a man in the household.

Participants also talk about laundry as a way to split their tasks with their female partners. Again, laundry is one of the spaces these men negotiate with their partners around some household tasks. When describing the task of doing laundry, Otis’ tone suggests that it is a task that has created tension and has been renegotiated within his family. He says,

We basically split the laundry. I wash, put it in the dryer, do all that stuff. She folds it and most of the time puts it away or I'll put it away if it sits there and I don't like looking at it anymore but I don't like doing laundry.

During this discussion, Otis is visibly frustrated by his wife's lack of help on some occasions. While he is participating in the laundry, he also states that he doesn't "like doing laundry," separating himself from this task. Matthew has also used laundry as a site for negotiation of household labor. He stated, "There have been a few things that I've - I've negotiated with my wife that okay you're going to do this, for instance, fold - fold the clothes, that's her responsibility. I'll wash them she folds them and after that she has um - there's really nothing that she is responsible for." Matthew and his wife have negotiated around laundry, where she is only responsible for folding the clothes.

Cooking

Another household task that is discussed by all fathers when asked about household labor in their homes was cooking and the cleaning of the kitchen. There are a few examples of fathers completely rejecting cooking that will be discussed in greater detail below. However, the majority of fathers either shared or were fully responsible for cooking for the family. Unlike the task of doing the laundry, fathers present cooking and cleaning the kitchen as a task that was enjoyable or at the very least, surrounded by less tension and negotiation. Cooking is framed as convenient for fathers to do in order for everyone in the family to eat either together at a reasonable time in the evening. Caleb, a father who participates in both local and national stay-at-home groups, describes cooking in a way that was fairly representative of several participants' sentiments. He states,

I have kind of a strong background in cooking so it's easier for me to get a pot roast going and have it ready for dinner by 6 than it is for her to try to come home and get something together right away, then we can eat before the kids' bedtime.

Cooking is not presented as a negative gendered task, rather something that needs to be done to support the family. In some instances, participants had experiences cooking professionally, influencing their desire to cook. In addition, recent attention toward cooking and professional chefs as spaces for men including shows like *Iron Chef* or *Show Down with Bobby Flay* have influenced the ways that men construct cooking as masculine. Unlike laundry, cooking was not seen as a feminine task, therefore fathers were less likely to reject it as such. Instead, most fathers embrace cooking. Will even suggests that he is a better cook than his wife, stating,

But if I - if I don't cook the meal that's really, that's sandwiches or frozen pizza for dinner. On the few nights that I am not home. No that actually - that's being really mean to her. I would say I cook probably 90 or 95% of the meals for dinner.

Although he backtracks and feels he was not being fair to his wife, he does reconfirm that he did the majority of the cooking for the family. Overall, while cooking tends to be associated with women, these participants do not struggle with taking on this role within their families.

Budgeting

Although very few fathers mention doing the bills as part of their description of the division of household labor, it is important to highlight that when they did, their wives are solely responsible for managing the household finances. Logan, a 42-year-old father of a toddler says, "She handles all of the budget - she handles the budget and the

bill pay.” Alan, a father of two girls, echoes this when he says, “You know, my wife does do the check book better than me; I still use my fingers to add.” Traditionally, fathers are viewed as the breadwinner and involved with the money management within the home. Although the majority of men in this study do not talk about budgeting as a household task, those who do underscore an important change in the ways their family does gender.

Household Maintenance

Although in some instances, participants cross gendered boundaries around household tasks, some of the most discussed household chores involved household maintenance. Traditionally, tasks including yard work, painting, fixing common household issues like a broken faucet have been left for men. In Hochschild’s (1989) *The Second Shift*, many of these tasks fall under the umbrella of “outdoor” chores. Many times, couples feel that by splitting chores between those that were outdoors and those indoors, create a somewhat equal division of household labor; however, Hochschild highlights how women were doing much more than their partners while also working outside the home. In the case of these stay-at-home fathers, while they are taking on other tasks, they continue to also participate in chores that are traditionally masculine. Wyatt, who attempts to equally share the household labor with his partner, states that he is mainly responsible for the household maintenance.

Usually when there's any minor home repairs that one of us is going to do, I'm the one who's doing that. So, I mean my wife - my wife helps but I guess - we do it together but I'm the one with all the carpentry - previous carpentry experience, so she tends to take a - a more observatory role with anything that involves assembling wood.

Although his wife may help, he is the one in charge of repairs around the home. Also in this narrative, defining his wife's participation as "helping" suggests that he is in charge while she is only allowed to assist.

A common discussion among fathers recognized the responsibility for the household repairs as gendered. Alan talks about this as different from what is expected from stay-at-home mothers.

But the other thing, what's interesting though, is not only do I do the inside, I do all the outside stuff too. So I have to balance around "Oh I have all of this stuff in here, but oh yeah you have a garden this year." We've got the whole yard with flowers and stuff, what not, and maintenance and the shed. So anyway, so I have to do it all. So it's a little larger than people think of just doing the domestic stuff. Then a lot of women, you know, aren't building sheds while they are sweeping the kitchen. So it's an interesting bundle of stuff to handle but it gets done.

He emphasizes that while he is responsible for the "domestic stuff," he continues to also be responsible for the outdoor chores as well, suggesting that he is doing more than what stay-at-home mothers would traditionally be expected to manage. Matthew also discusses his role in the maintenance of the household repairs and outdoor work:

I still do like 95 percent of all the house maintenance like fixing things, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, raking leaves, that kind of stuff. Well maybe I'll say 90 percent. So I do most of that; cleaning the garage cleaning, the utility room, cleaning the rooms down stairs. Yeah that's all - that's pretty much all me.

Men who discuss home maintenance and repairs as part of what they define as household labor, were responsible for the majority of these tasks. Matthew was 90-95 percent responsible for all maintenance tasks in his home. Alan was also responsible for these traditionally masculine tasks. By focusing so much of their discussions around these household repairs, these fathers are also participating in traditional notions of gendered roles. Logan supports this when he states,

I do all the maintenance in the house. You know, the heating and air conditioning system, cleaning the gutters outside or, you know, I just took care of all of the house...stuff. You know, all smoke detectors, you know, whatever just anything maintenance was all mine. She just pretty much spearheaded like the kitchen, the food, and things like that.

Although in many ways, Logan and his wife have crossed gendered boundaries, here he shows how he and his wife continue to conform to traditionally gendered tasks within the home. He participates in masculine household tasks such as cleaning the outside gutters or taking care of the smoke detectors while his wife is in charge of the cooking and kitchen. The repairs and household maintenance are not daily tasks that take a significant amount of time each day. Rather, maintenance and repairs need to be completed sometimes as few as once or twice a year while Logan's partner continues to manage the cooking and kitchen, tasks that can take up several hours each day. By participating in these traditionally gendered household tasks, Logan and his partner continue to enforce gendered roles within their family, despite changes to the breadwinning role.

Household maintenance continues to be one of the most gendered tasks fathers discuss. Fathers who talk about household repairs and maintenance manage almost all of the tasks around handling the repairs and outdoor spaces for their families. Through these discussions, these fathers underscore the ways that gendered tasks were still very much part of the division of household labor within their homes. While fathers challenge some expectations around cooking, budgeting and even laundry, household maintenance continues to be the men's responsibility.

Outside Help

An interesting aspect associated with the division of the household labor for these fathers is the use of paid outside help. Several fathers talk about how they are responsible for the majority of the household labor; however, later on in the discussion also talk about the paid household help. Within these discussions, fathers talk about household help in two ways. First, fathers mention paid help as an afterthought to their discussion of the household. Otis does this in his description of the household labor. He said, “As far as vacuuming, like dusting, doing that sort of stuff, we split that but we also have a cleaning lady that comes in twice a month. Um...which is a really big help.” While he acknowledges that having help with the cleaning is “a really big help,” it is also an afterthought in his discussion of the amount of household he and his wife take on.

Alex, a 42-year-old father of a toddler expresses a similar sentiment.

Yeah, I do, I do everything in the house, yeah. Yeah, I mean we have, yeah, we have, you know, we have cleaning people, we have, you know, landscaping, we have all the normal stuff for a big house. I take care of the house, make all the, all the appointments, everything, you know, there are always people working in the house, so, you know, I do all that.

In this quote, Alex defines household labor as the managing of the appointments and those who take care of the home rather than by the tasks associated with cleaning or cooking for the family. In both cases, outside help was not seen as taking over the household labor but rather another aspect of the household labor.

The second way fathers talk about paid help around household labor is a way to comment on the financial success of their partners. Rather than talking about household labor itself, these fathers dismiss household labor as important because it is managed by paid employees and not an important aspect of their stay-at-home identity. By focusing

on the amount of money their family has, these fathers are able to use the privilege and status associated with wealth to disregard aspects of their family's arrangement that may question their masculinities. Rather than staying home out of necessity, they are able to frame staying home as a choice suggesting that they could work outside of the home but are financially secure enough to stay home. Because their families are taken care of financially, breadwinning is not as imperative as families where staying home was not by choice. By dismissing household labor as unimportant, they are not forced to talk about the gendered tasks associated with the division of household labor.

The Rejection of Household Tasks

An interesting aspect of conversations around the division of household labor with these fathers comes from the types of household tasks that they reject or refuse to participate in. One of the most distinct conversations around tasks fathers refuse to participate in was from Kevin, a former pilot. When asked about the division of household labor, he quickly turns the conversation to how he sees his role more distinctly different than that of the stay-at-home mother. In particular, because he does not cook, he takes his children out to dinner most nights.

Because I didn't cook, I had an hour and a half every day to my kids, with my kids by myself in a restaurant where we, where I taught them how to talk, where I taught them how to have conversations, and to be articulate. I taught them how to express themselves. That's not something that happens in a household where you have just one parent that is cooking and then trying to get through a meal and all the chores associated with the meal. So I attribute my relationship with my kids almost solely to that quality time I spent with them every single day. So that was distinctly different.

Rather than cooking at home, he is able to take his children out to eat. Here he is responding to gendered expectations of cooking for a family associated with mothers, particularly stay-at-home mothers. He suggests that by taking his children out for meals, he was able to teach them things that they would not have learned if he had to cook.

Fathers' rejections of doing the laundry also are gendered. As discussed before, laundry was a task many fathers rejected. Isaac, a father of two preschool aged children, said, "I don't do laundry unless I absolutely have to. I can literally count the number of times on one hand on how many times I've actually started the washer in the last five years." The way he emphasizes the number of time he has participated in doing the laundry, Isaac suggests that in some ways, he is proud to not be responsible for the laundry. Isaac emphasizes his lack of laundry skills by suggesting he has had so little experience even starting the washer. In this narrative, he distances himself with the responsibility of laundry, a task several of fathers construct as a feminine chore. His rejection of laundry is an attempt to separate himself from tasks that he views as associated with women or femininity. The rejection of household tasks helps provide a space for fathers to distance themselves from gendered chores, therefore helping them to conform to traditional notions of masculinities.

FEELINGS AROUND THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR

During discussions around household labor, participants also discuss the labor or tasks their partners are responsible for and their feelings around how the household labor was managed as a whole within their household. Fathers talk about their wives' participation in household chores in three ways: first, participants praise their partners for

their efforts to help take care of the household chores. Second, some participants believe that their wives should not have to participate much in the household labor because they worked outside of the home. Finally, some participants focus on their frustrations with the lack of participation or the quality of the household work done by their partners. Throughout these narratives, fathers also discuss the tensions around the division of household labor and how in many ways, these divisions are gendered. Here, tensions consist of the struggles and constant negotiation of household labor and tasks for stay-at-home fathers and their families. Participants experience tensions around household labor at different times but three themes around their feelings about the division of household labor were present. First, fathers discuss feelings of praise for their partners when they participate in the household labor. Second, fathers frame household labor as their responsibility because their partners work outside of the home. Finally, participants discuss their frustrations with their partners for not participating enough in the household labor. In addition, I examine how these tensions are both gendered and expressions of power, or lack thereof for these men.

Praise

First, fathers express praise for their partners for participating in the household labor. Jude states,

She dives in and does the household stuff that she does, like, she still does the laundry, except for mine. I take care of mine but she does the house laundry, the kids and hers. So that's a ton of work.

Although she works outside the home during the day, Jude's wife still participates in some of the household labor. Here, Jude recognizes that his wife comes home to begin

her second shift working on household tasks and he praises her efforts. Grant, a father of two children from Virginia, makes similar comments around his wife's participation in the household labor.

She - she - it - sometime she puts me to shame and I get, you know, she'll come home and she'll like (pause) clean up the entire playroom and put everything away and then she'll like dust the entire house. You know, she'll - in like 1 day she'll do more than I did in an entire week. Um...but you know, you know, that's...that's great, and I - and I appreciate it, um, but I - I wouldn't say that that happens all the time.

In this quote, Grant touches on several aspects of household labor. At first he praises his wife for her participation and ability to do so much in such a short amount of time.

However, he also shows his discomfort with her help as if it is a reflection on the amount of work he does or does not get done in a week. He also is quick to discount her household labor by suggesting that she does not participate "all the time." While he is praising her effort, Grant also suggests that his wife's participation in household labor causes conflicting feelings for him. By discounting her participation, he attempts to hide his fear that she is judging his ability to clean their home and therefore not succeeding in his position within the home.

Responsibility

Fathers also talk about household labor as their responsibility and their partners should not be responsible for these tasks because they work outside the home. When asked how he and his partner divide the household labor, Brent responds by stating he is responsible for all of it. He says,

No, 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.

His partner is not responsible for any of the household labor because he feels like it falls under his role as the stay-at-home parent. Several other fathers felt similarly, taking on the majority of the household labor while their partners were responsible for little or none of the household tasks. When women were responsible for aspects of the household labor, it was almost always laundry. Alan confirms this when he says, "She works in IT and does some laundry, her laundry. Nothing worse than me getting her stuff in the dryer." Matthew reiterates this when he says,

I'll wash them she folds them and after that she has um - there's really nothing that she is responsible for. But otherwise there's not too many other things that she's - oh and she - she has her own bathroom that only she uses, the kids can't use it, and she is responsible for that - cleanup of that room. That's uh - that's pretty much it, I do pretty much everything else.

In both of these situations, these men take on the majority of the responsibility for the household labor; however their partner takes care of some of the laundry and other small tasks around the home. In these situations, there is less talk about the tensions around the division of household labor than other situations.

Frustration

Finally, participants also express frustration regarding the amount of household labor their partners were responsible for. This frustration is highlighted well by Liam, a father of six children:

And one of my major frustrations is she'll, on like weekends or days she's off, it just drives me nuts. And it's hard to not sound like I'm whining about it but we have taught the kids that you have to clear your dishes, put away the food you got

out. She literally will get up and leave everything including her can of coke and whatever else, just leave it right on the table right there. It's just...I had just decided I'm not going to clean it up one day. It was like on a Friday or Saturday. Actually it was a Friday night because she had, the house was really nice and clean. She came home, didn't eat what I had prepared, which is kind of a slap in the face, and left it there. She left it there and I was like, I'm not going to clean this up. It was there for the entire weekend. Finally on Monday, her day off, Monday afternoon, she finally picked it up. The kids were like, why is this still here? Because Mom left it there. They knew it was hers because I don't eat that stuff, what she was eating. And I'm not going to put her stuff away. Why? Because I'm so frustrated because she always does this. Well say something to her. No, she doesn't need me to say anything to her. She's an adult.

In this narrative, Liam's frustration around his wife's lack of involvement in cleaning up resulted in a standoff between his wife and himself. Beyond her lack of help, Liam's frustration also is a result of not receiving the recognition he feels he should have as the main care-giver. Although there is no solution in this narrative, he is able to make his point by not cleaning up after his wife. Kevin, a father of two middle school aged children, also discusses his frustrations around household labor. He says,

My wife did the laundry for a really long time until I had finally had it with all the clothes that she was ruining. So I ended up taking over laundry because I was sick and tired of having to throw out so much. Because she was just using bleach on everything. She was washing everything on one setting with bleach and it was ruining everything. That made me nuts especially perfectly good stuff that like, we had just got, you know? So I took over laundry, like ten years ago. Since then, we haven't had any of those issues.

Although he struggles with his wife's attempts at laundry, he is able to solve the issue by taking on the responsibility for the laundry. Later in the interview, he states

My wife and my two kids are also slob and I tend to be a lot neater. I end up doing a lot more picking up than she does. You know, at some point, you just realize that this is who they are. You know, I'm not going to change them. We have some kind of baseline rules for the kids about how they have to keep their room. But my wife is like, it's part of the package. So, okay, I'm not going to change her.

Kevin learned to live with his wife's level of participation in the household tasks. Throughout both of these narratives is evidence of tension as well as solutions to the division of household labor. These two narratives exemplify how the division of household labor is continually negotiated and can at times be straining for these stay-at-home fathers.

Gendered Divisions

An important aspect within these discussions of household labor is how household labor is still influenced by gender. For some of these families, traditionally feminine household tasks are still left for participants' female partners. In other situations, fathers' struggles with taking on these household tasks resulted in discussions around gender and hegemonic masculinities. Otis, a father of two-year-old twin girls exemplifies this tension around gendered expectations around household labor in this narrative about household labor.

I think that um - I think as far as like the - the household uh chores roles things go, um the - you know, it's - it's (pause) it's a constant that it's not a battle, it's not a debate, but it's a constant like change and you know until your kids are...I think re- you know really old enough and out of the house, like going to school sort of thing. It changes every day, because it's a different uh you know it's different every day, you know, for me it's a different - it's even different than a lot of guys that I know - a lot of other dads that I know because mostly the dads that I know have women - have wives, whatever, that are - that go to work. Go to work, you come home and it's - they don't have a lot of the like luxuries and freedoms that we do, because you know my wife can pay the bills on her lunch hour, or you know what - however it - it works, answer the phone, and she can get up and vacuum for 15 minutes on - you know if she needs a break from work or something like that. But it also presents other challenges when my kids are home because they want their mother and you know, she works in an open office and you can't close the door and you know so there's those challenges. But you know for the roles, it's just whatever works best for your household...but I think and she has said this lately, recently, and I've heard it from a lot of other guys is that,

"Well you're home, you're expected to do you know, you have the time that's the - part of the at-home parent role." "Whether it - it's a mom or a dad" you know, cause I - like I said, I talked to a lot of other stay-at-home moms and the mentality I think is very much the same as, this is stuff that has to get done, you're the person that's home, it's kind of your, you know, job, in air quotes, to do it. It's, you know (sigh) it kind of goes along with, well if you were paying someone to do this, you know, if you both were away and you were paying someone to do this, like it'd be a job, so it's kind of like one of those things that just has to get done, does that make sense? So, I don't know, um...but yeah so (sigh) cooking, cleaning, doing laundry might not be, I believe, masculine roles, but they're not feminine roles either, they're just roles and you know, it's just, they're just chores that have to get done, but society has made them feminine roles. But I grew up doing all that stuff myself, you know. Like my mom was a working, you know, my parents were divorced, my mom was working a lot so I was home a lot to do that stuff, you know, me and my sisters, just things you were raised to do well. I'm a man, I do those things. You know, you have to, so.

Within the quote, Otis both challenges and helps to reconstruct traditional gendered roles.

As a stay-at-home father, he is expected to take on the majority of the household chores.

Throughout this narrative he goes between struggling to align this with his expectations of masculinities and manhood while also suggesting that household labor should not be seen as a feminine role. By talking about his challenges with taking on these chores traditionally associated with women, he is acknowledging the traditional assumptions around household labor and attempting to change these assumptions.

Feelings toward Household Labor within their Homes

When asked about their feelings toward the division of household labor within their homes, participants talk about the struggles they continue to feel as they navigate the division of household chores. Other participants focus on finding a way to divide the household labor in a way that works for both them and their partner. Carl, a new father who recently decided to stay home after teaching for several years as a professor at a

local university, highlights many of the tensions he continues to struggle as with he and his partner navigate the division of household chores.

It is very (pauses) interesting. I totally understand women who are upset with their men who come home from work and just want to sit in front of the T.V. I tot - I mean I get it, because I was like that, when I was working I just wanted sit and so I'm looking forward when my partner comes home to have a break from the kid to do something maybe outside of the house or just do something up in the attic. You know, just do something and of course she just wants to unwind from work, um, so it's - it is a tough issue and I - there's a great scene in - that I show in my classroom of Mad Men from the first season of Mad Men, when um...Don Draper and Betty Draper are lying in bed and he's - she's like just upset about everything and he says "well what - what do you want? What do you want from me?" and she just says, and I get emotional thinking about this cause now I totally relate to it, she says, "I just want your help in raising these children." Cause you know, he you know - you - you know Mad Men, I mean, he's like an ad executive and he's also having affairs and, you know, he's - and there's a - do you know the work of - of Dorothy Smith? So you know this whole notion of the domestic sphere and the public sphere and the women do the work so the men can have everything and I mean this is - I'm - I'm just living Dorothy Smith. So yeah, the housework thing is tough and it's - it's just endless, it's like the people who paint the golden gate bridge. You know they paint it and they to one end and they have to go back - yeah it's like it's constantly being painted it's never like for the last 60 years it hasn't been not being painted. Yeah, so it's so - it's just so (long pause) it's just so...there's just so much, you don't realize - I mean and this - and imagine when she - and we want to have other kids too so I imagine...you know t - two kids in their...you know school age years is going to be insane. Right? So, uh yeah, the housework thing is (long pause) is uh a chore, no pun intended, um uh to divide up.

Carl touches on a struggle that is not unique to stay-at-home fathers. He mentions feeling lonely, tired and looking forward to his wife returning from work so he not only has adult interaction but can be freed from some of the responsibility associated with being the parent at home. In this quote, it's not necessarily the household labor that he struggles with but the recognition of the work he is doing within the home. As a white man who has held a prestigious job within a university for several years, he is not used to participating in this unseen labor within the home. He was regularly recognized for his

work outside the home and now as a stay-at-home father, he recognizes all the work that was happening within his home that was unseen. He suggests that his partner does not recognize his efforts within the home. Benjamin, a stay-at-home father who is transitioning back to work after several years at home also discusses the tensions around household labor within his home. He also highlights this aspect of invisible work but also talks about the resentment he struggles with toward his wife.

Yeah, um I do it all. And then I get a little resentful of that at times because I'm like y- I'm just - it's so tedious to do it over and over and over and over again, you know, do the laundry, fold all the clothes, you know, do all the um...go to the grocery store, and then loading up the groceries it's - and not really having any support there but uh, you know, intellectually I know that's like - that's the plan that's how we divided our labor - we've been very explicit in outlining our roles and that's what I do, so it's just, um...you know, for me I have this weird...issue like baggage where if - if, you know, if my partner is not helping care for our household and nurturing it in cleaning it and keeping it cl - I take offense to that. I feel like they're not actually being um...they don't really like our relationship or something like that. I know it's totally - it's total bullshit but that's just kind of what happens inside of me sometimes. I have to check myself and say, you know what this - she's - she's the one who's going out and making money traveling and - on business constantly and I'm the one who does this, and that's how we keep the ship moving forward (sigh) so (sigh) and I cook, but that's - that's kind of my outlet.

Benjamin recognizes that he and his wife have decided together to divide household chores this way, however, he catches himself struggling to not be resentful because of the tediousness and the lack of recognition he gets for taking on these chores. Like Carl, Benjamin's frustrations are not new or limited to stay-at-home fathers. From Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* onward, researchers have highlighted the frustrations and isolation women have felt as the main care-giver and one responsible for the majority of the household labor. In many ways, these stay-at-home fathers are experiencing similar struggles.

While several fathers discuss their frustrations, other fathers suggest that the division of household labor is not presently an issue for them. Rather, it is something that they discuss with their partners and is continually being negotiated. While there are still tensions at times, these fathers talk less about their frustrations and more about the process of dividing the household labor. For Will, dividing the household labor is not as much an issue as figuring out the standard of cleaning that is acceptable for both partners.

I don't think we had trouble figuring out the divide, so much as the definition of clean - the like merging of the cleaned piles, does that make sense? And what actually helped us the most with the cleaning stuff was to sit down and make out a schedule. So like Mondays are floor days, like the floors in the whole house are done on Monday. Tuesday and Wednesday are dusting, or Tuesday/Thursday are dusting. Friday is another vacuum day - like...so it's very clear these are the things that are done so it's not (sighs) (long pause) it makes it really sound like it's a chore list. It's...it's so she knows what's been done. It - it just alleviated any arguments we had about cleaning stuff up, about whether or not something was done or done right or... So it's not the "oh you haven't dusted in a couple of days" well that's because dusting day was 2 days ago, I'm dusting again tomorrow like...does that make sense? That there - there's a schedule so it just...any little bit of like fighting about how clean something was is now gone, it's like well it's going to be gone tomorrow, this is the schedule we agreed on.

In Will's family, his wife struggles to trust that the housework is being done and by creating a schedule, they are able to relieve some of the tension around the household chores. Similarly, Landon, a father of a six-month-old, and his partner also created a schedule to help ease the tension around household labor.

What we did when we were dating is before we got married, we pretty much like had like a session where we took a marker board (laugh) and we wrote on the marker board like every - like she got her first choice, and I got my choice, you know and then we divided, we figured out like how much time each thing took um and then we kind of like made it even and then throughout the year, if one person's has started to get overwhelmed, then the other person will take one of their tasks. Um yeah so we kind of like you know this actually - I know like a lot of couples fight about that and they also fight about money. I would say that we - luckily we don't fight about those two things very often. Yeah, it's - and I think

that's the way that we view it like I kind of view it as my job and she - she like I said, the things that she does, she really loves... So it works out pretty nice.

By allowing each partner to choose what tasks they want to be responsible for, Landon and his wife are able to create a solution that works best for them. For fathers who still struggle with the division of household labor and even for those who do not, the division of household labor is not static. Rather there are tensions and discussions around who does what and even what it means to take on these tasks. For these stay-at-home fathers, the struggles and tensions around household labor continue to be areas of discussion and importance.

CONCLUSION

Household labor is rich with assumptions and divisions based on gender. Although many participants talk about doing all or the majority of the household labor, there are many instances where participants reject particular aspects of household labor that tend to be seen as more feminine. Specifically, the rejection and dislike for laundry among participants as well as the gendered talk about their lack of ability to successfully wash and dry clothes is an example of how these fathers continue to participate in some traditional notions of masculinities. Throughout these discussions there are both explicit and implicit instances of tension and struggle around the division of household labor. In some instances, this is a result of gendered expectations. Participants reject certain tasks because they are viewed as more feminine while taking on others. Specifically, the majority of fathers participate in home repairs and yard work, tasks that are weekly and sometimes seasonally, while distancing themselves from laundry, a task that can be daily.

In other instances, fathers struggle with the lack of recognition, particularly from their partners, the invisible work of household labor brings. Overall, the division of household labor is the responsibility of these stay-at-home fathers to varying degrees, however, it is a site of gendered roles and assumptions.

CHAPTER 5

ISOLATION

Unlike previous chapters focusing on resistance and household labor, participants' discussions of isolation are many times subtle and couched in conversations around the workplace and adult interactions. Several conversations with stay-at-home fathers bring up issues of isolation and loneliness while talking about daily life, friends, and the decision to stay home. In some cases, while talking about their love of being a stay-at-home father, fathers also comment about feelings of isolation in this role. This chapter analyzes the ways fathers talk about isolation and feelings of loneliness both directly and in the context of lack of support and need for adult interaction. This chapter also focuses on those fathers who do not feel isolated or lonely. Throughout their discussions of isolation, these fathers also continue to construct what it means to be a stay-at-home father as a distinct identity separate from both other fathers and stay-at-home mothers.

FEELINGS OF ISOLATION

Few participants feel comfortable directly discussing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Matthew, a father of three children and involved in the national stay-at-home father organization, discusses his feelings about his position as a stay-at-home father. While he is happy in his position, he struggles to find other adults who accept him as a stay-at-home father.

You know I think that - one of the um hardest things about being a stay-at-home dad is just the - how easy it can be to become lonely because it's hard to find other people that will accept you as a stay-at-home dad that you can socialize with. I'm

really lucky to have this - this social group that I keep up with and I almost always have someone I can do something with, me - just me alone or me and my kids um but a lot of guys don't have that opportunity and um - and even if I do want to do something with my friends I - I'll almost always have to travel um even though there are other kids on - like right around me you know within - within blocks um it's hard for me to get to know those parents and the kids because I'm a stay-at-home dad um, not a stay-at-home mom and I think that's - that is the - probably the toughest part of being a stay-at-home dad is you're just um you're just - it's really easily to become alone, not everybody is um hopefully - I know a lot of guys find ways to deal with that but you have to work harder to not become alone.

In this narrative, Matthew attributes his feelings of loneliness to his status as a stay-at-home father. In his experience, he has not encountered many stay-at-home mothers or other fathers who he feels like he can relate to; therefore finding the national group has created a space for him to find interaction with others. Matthew mentions being a stay-at-home father several times as the reason he has not found support within his community, suggesting that his role is very different from the role of a stay-at-home mother. Although there are several kids close in age to his own who live around his home, he has not been able to connect with any of their parents because of his status as a stay-at-home father.

George, who also participates in the national stay-at-home father organization but is not involved in a local organization, discusses feelings of loneliness as a stay-at-home father.

Yes. I - I find it a very rewarding experience - it's - it's very isolating and - and you can kind of go crazy being...I guess that's - that's something else I can kind of talk about. Um...and then also the other thing that I - I wanted to mention is kind of how - how isolated and lonely our job can be. I mean it's a great job, I love doing this, and I wouldn't give it up, I love spending time with my daughter but...there's a lot of time where...it's just me and her and you kind of go a little stir crazy and, it's difficult to keep motivated. You don't have a boss who's giving you jobs um...you don't really have anything to - to mark your progress against except for your own self-doubt. It can - can be hard...to - to decide to get up and cook or

- or clean or...whatever when...you know, really... I don't know. It feels like nothing would really go horribly wrong if you just spent the entire day just sitting on the couch watching Star Trek or something. No...Uh well...it kind of comes in waves. There - there are times when you get your motivation up and then everything seems to go well for a while and you hold it together and then it kind of falls apart again. I think overall...it gets a little easier as she gets older. Because she cares a little bit more and she's there to kind of grade and judge you a little bit. She becomes less of...less of a kind of egg or a - a worm that you need to take care of and more of...a buddy that you go on adventures with. Yeah, I don't know.

George struggles with the tensions between enjoying his time with his young daughter and his feelings of isolation. Although he does not mention not having support from others like Matthew, George constructs his narrative around the idea that he is alone with his daughter for the majority of the time. The monotonous nature of caring for his daughter and the lack of adult interaction creates feelings of isolation for George. He also compares his time at home with working outside the home when referencing the lack of a “boss giving you jobs.” The lack of direction for George creates tensions in his feelings around being home. Without the feedback outside works provides, George struggles with doubting himself in his role. There is no rubric for George to measure his success in the home making George feel directionless at times. While stay-at-home mothers may feel this way at times, women tend to be socialized and pressured to portray their home as welcoming and clean. Because men are not expected to care for a home in the same way, George may feel less pressure than stay-at-home mothers causing him to feel directionless at times. Finally, Alan also shares similar feelings of isolation.

As far as myself? Oh yeah. It's very isolating. It's not nearly as social as I thought it would be. I thought it would be a big ice breaker and all that stuff. I realized that there are a lot of lone rangers out there, particularly on the guy's side. And gal's 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...

Like Matthew, Alan compares himself to stay-at-home mothers, suggesting that stay-at-home fathers are different. In both narratives, Matthew and Alan also suggest that mothers see stay-at-home fathers as both different and suspicious, creating distance and isolation for stay-at-home fathers. When asked if Alan attempted to spend time with other mothers, he responds,

Oh yeah, they are pretty, um, walled off. 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 goes on to suggest that stay-at-home mothers are not as interested in talking about raising children but would rather socialize, leaving him out of the conversation.

Although his focus is around his feelings of isolation, he constructs his situation around the idea that he has been left out of other moms' groups. Rather than describing himself as lonely or wanting to be part of these groups, he suggests that he is unwelcome in these mother-centered groups because of his focus on his children. In doing this, he is constructing himself and the role of the stay-at-home father as more focused on the children and despite being isolating, better than the role of the stay-at-home mother.

Alan's construction of the stay-at-home father role is linked to characteristics associated with masculinities including power, competition and control. He suggests that he cares for his children better than other stay-at-home mothers care for their children because he does not look for socialization with other parents. By criticizing stay-at-home mothers, he suggests that stay-at-home fathers parent as well and many times better than mothers.

DESIRING INTERACTION

Fathers also discuss feelings of isolation and loneliness in other more subtle ways. Expectations of masculinities influence how these fathers discuss isolation in the context of other aspects staying home. The freedom to admit feelings of loneliness is restricted by hegemonic masculinities that require men to be stoic and unemotional. To admit these feelings of loneliness challenges these expectations and can make men feel less masculine. Therefore, throughout these conversations around isolation, the majority of men discuss these feelings in relation to other issues around staying home. Many times, participants use control over their situation to help offset feelings of insecurity around their masculinities.

One way fathers discuss feelings of isolation is centered on the desire for friendship and support from other adults, particularly those who are also parents. Participants highlight the difficulties of navigating caring for young children and the desire for community with other parents in order to talk about these issues.

Benjamin explains his desire for help as he struggled through the first couple months of his daughter's life.

Then, you know, for friends, uh...don't really talk much about it. A lot of my friends don't have children and they didn't really - they don't really understand - they - they don't quite like get it a little bit, you know, like they understand intellectually what I'm doing but they don't really...see the value in it. Then, you know, I found that there to be kind of a lack of...support networks, really to be honest with you, you know when you're with - home with the baby and mom's at work or your partner's at work and you're basically fumbling around figuring out routines and figuring out how to, you know, de- um...um - defrost breast milk and feed it to the baby and so on and so forth um you know, you just - you're doing it by yourself.

Benjamin touches on multiple reasons he felt alone during this time. He did not have the emotional support of his friend network because they “don’t have children and they don’t really understand.” Although he acknowledges that they intellectually know that he is struggling with caring for his young daughter, they are unable to support him through the experience because they have not experienced something similar. He also briefly mentions feeling a lack of support system overall as he tries to figure out a routine for his young daughter. He goes on to talk more about what he wants out of a support system.

And you can talk to people on the phone and you can tell them about your day, but, you know, that's not really...much of a support network. I mean when you say support network, I think about people who - who, you know, help you out physically with some of the tasks that you're taking on and who are, you know, just coming and being present with you, you know. Sitting with you in a room with a baby or taking the baby from your hands or just, you know, baby sitting or expressing interest and doing actual, you know, part of the solution and not just talking about the solution.

In order to find support and community to help with these feelings of isolation and struggle, Benjamin founded a local stay-at-home father group in his hometown of Seattle. While he found stay-at-home mother groups in the area, he feels that his experiences as a stay-at-home father are different and looked for support from other fathers.

I think that that's a really isolating feeling and I - and I've wanted more of it and so I created uh this - this group for stay at home dads because I was like looking around and I was like, I can't really find anything that is stay-at-home dad specific. There's a lot of, you know, stay-at-home mom stuff, I mean there's, there's excess of stay-at-home mom stuff and there's nothing - and you know if I came across a couple of webpages that were...you know, kind of, hadn't been visited for a while, you know, that a stay-at-home dad had - had created and it had been like abandon like two years ago or something like that and so it was like okay well I'm just going to try to start something and I got a couple of dads and we were interested in doing some things and - and so we started doing a weekly thing and creating a support network that way which was a lot more... I mean as soon as that started happening I felt like my new identity started - I started accepting my new identity, and things were not as challenging any more. I think that the first eight to ten months were extremely challenging and a lot of times

were - there were more thoughts of like "what did I get myself into?" and - as opposed to "oh this is awesome."

In this narrative, Benjamin links his identity as a stay-at-home father to his feelings around being supported. The creation of the group specifically for stay-at-home fathers and the rejection of stay-at-home mother groups, Benjamin constructs his role as at stay-at-home father as distinctly different from stay-at-home mothers. He emphasizes this by discussing his identity as a stay-at-home father. Only once he found a community of other stay-at-home fathers was he able to accept this new identity for himself.

Noah, a father of two children from Portland, Oregon also discusses his feelings around this identity as a stay-at-home father and feelings of isolation.

The thing that I found in Portland were being a stay-at-home dad isn't it that big of a deal, there are a lot of dads, playgrounds or around see you don't get the same looks toward a level of looks or comments. You will occasionally. As a result I found that it's harder to get dad to join a group or come to a thing like this because they don't feel as isolated. And you will find moms who befriend them and invite them to stuff, that kind of thing. It's a great city for that. That said there's still, it's still very mom everything. Dudes are welcome but are still little bit of the foot note.

While Noah has had more welcoming experiences with stay-at-home mothers and others around his role as a stay-at-home father, he still suggests that there is something different about his role. Although he feels welcome, he suggests there is a "bit of a foot note," around his involvement with stay-at-home mothers and groups for mothers.

Like I'm involved in this co-op. I'm on the board of this co-op we just had our board meeting last week where I kind of talked about how I'm the only dad the board and they all know that I'm a stay-at-home dad and they think it's great. But I talked about around Mother's Day, we have muffins for moms, they make gifts and cards, decorate and the kids a musical number and the moms come in and they get muffins and get sung to. It's sweet. It's nice. And then they have doughnuts for dads, which is on Saturday morning. Basically were going to have an open house the dad can come and see what they can school like. This is a co-op where parent involvement has really encouraged and they're making very

gendered assumptions about how families work. It was a little imbalance in terms of there was no card, or gift or song. The kids even have to be there because they were in class. So I talked about this. I don't want to blow this out of proportion but we try so hard in other ways to be gender balanced. It was interesting how they all immediately agreed, but until I finally said something about it, it wasn't going to change.

In this narrative, Noah calls out gendered assumptions about fathering and families.

Noah is the only man on the board for the co-op and while he feels relatively accepted by the other women on the committee, he feels like he must speak up about gendered assumptions within the relatively progressive co-op. In both of these narratives by Noah and Benjamin, there is a discussion of loneliness or being left out along with the need to be recognized as different from stay-at-home mothers. By creating this difference, these fathers are constructing a role that is uniquely for men.

Adult Interaction

Similar to stay-at-home mothers, fathers discuss the desire to spend time with other adults (Strange, Fisher, Howat and Wood 2014). While these fathers are not specifically seeking support from other parents or stay-at-home fathers, their feelings of isolation and loneliness is centered on the lack of adult interaction.

When talking about feeling supported, Isaac, a father of two children, discusses his feelings of being overwhelmed and lacking friends who could help him through the experience.

Yeah, I think emotionally, I am. Yeah. If I needed the help – I mean there have been a couple of times where I felt like I needed to talk to someone because it just really bad that day. It was usually early on and I didn't really leave the house for the first six months because he was colicky and stuff. So it was hard to venture out. Yeah, I have a bunch of good friends. They didn't have kids when I was going through that portion of it so they didn't quite understand that but they were

good to lean on during that time, so to speak. Support-wise, like asking for advice and stuff like that, like I said, we did the teachers and parents program so I could ask those parents. Most of those moms and dads were pretty friendly and were willing to give me advice. I think that the parent and teachers program kind of saved me. Got me started. I told my wife, I was like “I don’t have -when my daughter was born I was 37. I have a master’s degree but I can’t figure out how to make this girl stop crying! I mean I hear about these teen moms all the time. They’re single. They’re by themselves. They’re working at, you know, McDonalds, trying to make ends meet. And I have a pretty good income, I’m 37, I own a house, I own a master’s degree – you know? I don’t know how they do it!” Yeah, when I was getting started, I was like, “How in the world?” That was hard. Knowing that other people, people much younger than me in worse situations were doing just fine with their kids. I was like, I just can’t do this!

Although he did not have the support of other fathers at first, Isaac does find support through his teachers and parents program. Even with this support, he still finds himself questioning how he could get through the first couple of years with his daughter as the main care-giver. His desire to talk with other parents about parenting was motivated by his struggles caring for his daughter alone during the day.

Other fathers also discuss their experiences socializing with other adults. Brent, a father of two children who is not involved with any stay-at-home father organizations discusses his experiences with spending time with other adults.

Our new neighbors, they have, you know they have a sitter that comes over and when they’re not working, you know we hang out sometimes, but you know, I would say no. I don’t socialize a lot. It’s kind of hard to with a schedule too. So you know, she’s on more of a schedule then he is right now. So she goes from taking two naps a day, she has to feed so there is very little down time with her schedule.

While occasionally, he spends time with friends, he is limited in his availability because of his infant daughter’s schedule. Although his son is older and able to be more flexible, caring for his children takes over much of Brent’s social time. Harvey also discusses a lack time to spend with his friends and how it contributes to his feelings of loneliness.

Not being with my friends, going out, you know hanging out with my friends. Just being me and her always, constantly, no one else. It's just kind of hard. It gets a little frustrating sometimes because she's quite a handful. It's difficult. You know, some of our friends come over but they end up leaving because, you know, I'm paying more attention to my daughter and stuff like that. So it's a lot of the time what I miss and I miss my friends, hanging out with my friends. That's probably the most difficult.

Later in the interview, Harvey also reveals that most of his friends do not have children, making the divide between him and his friends even greater. He also reveals that his availability to spend time with his friends has dwindled more since being home and not less because he now takes on more of the care-giving role, even when his wife is at home. In this narrative, Harvey highlights the tensions between the desire to be home with his daughter and his need for time with his friends.

Finally, Evan also discusses his frustration with craving adult interaction but being shut out of spaces that are traditionally held by mothers including stay-at-home mother groups and dance lessons. When asked if he would like to spend time with other stay-at-home fathers, Evan responds,

I would like to because I would like adult interaction but the biggest misperception it seems that from my experience and some of the things I have seen for whatever reason, stay-at-home dads aren't really accepted by the stay-at-home moms. Especially when I'm daughter is doing dance, at a dance studio, there was this whole group of moms and their cans with their daughters going into dance class, then there is lowly Evan, the only dad that's there. It's just like trying to have a conversation, it was tough. It felt like they were questioning why is this man here. So a couple of them finally started to talk to me and got the perception that I'm not there to hit on them, to be with them. I'm just there looking to know how their day is, how their days are with their children. So at that point it became a little easier but, I'm still the oddity.

Evan attempts to interact with other mothers at his daughter's dance class but was not welcomed at first by many of the mothers. As the only father, Evan felt out of place and it took time for other mothers to interact with him. Still, he says he feels like "the oddity."

He goes on to discuss his situation and struggles being a stay-at-home father in the area he and his family live.

When I look at it it's the start of the Bible belt, and things are still how unfortunately a lot of things are in the United States. We are still so far stuck in our times that like I said I feel like I am the oddity. I'm not the norm so to be there part of something, they don't understand is the way I look at it. My wife had the career. I had the job. She continues to work; I help out with my family by staying home with my kids. And then I have done research for a course they had taken recently, the instructor had asked us to do some research, and the thing that I was realizing, I just want to talk and get to know but it's like I do things that are different because I'm dad.

After doing research on stay-at-home fathers and fatherhood, Evan is convinced that his role is different because he is a father staying home. Like Noah, Benjamin and several other fathers throughout this study, Evan suggests that the role of the stay-at-home father is uniquely different and specifically tied to fatherhood and masculinities. Because of his role, others parents do not know how to relate to him.

Fathers struggle with their lack of social interaction with other adults, creating isolation and loneliness. Throughout these discussions, these fathers suggest there are differences between them and stay-at-home mothers, creating a barrier to meaningful interaction with them. Additionally, some fathers suggest that they feel uncomfortable becoming friends with mothers because they do not want to make the women's partners feel jealous. Participants did not talk about jealous feelings their partners may experience but instead worried about how the men in the other women's lives would feel, suggesting a sense of comradery they feel with other men. The role of the stay-at-home father is being constructed as masculine. This is highlighted by participants' desire to interact with other fathers instead of stay-at-home mothers.

Lack of Interaction from Other Stay-at-Home Fathers

One area that several fathers discuss is their lack of interaction with other stay-at-home fathers. This lack of interaction is another cause of feelings of isolation for these fathers. Alan describes his experiences with others stay-at-home fathers in response to a question about spending time with other stay-at-home fathers.

Not really. No, no. I've met a few but they're...they don't really talk. They are really lone rangers. I'm really surprised. I mean, I've had people get out of their car when I'm with my two girls and we're just bopping along the street, and you look back and see them slam their door and off they go. Instead of good morning, how you doing or how's your rodeo doing today or whatever. You know just a little humor at all. They just leave and I'm like okay. You just have to go out in the world and so...

Although Alan would like to get to know other stay-at-home fathers, he has not met others that would be interested in talking about their experiences or in many cases just saying hello. Below he explains why he thinks many fathers act this way.

Yeah, I think that lot of people are a little over their head a little bit, especially guys because they don't trust their gut and they don't think that they have a skill set to do it. Or maybe economically they are pushed into that position because their work skill set or whatever. Or they don't listen to themselves. I mean I am raising two little girls. I'm a farm boy, you know, and for me to switch to thinking okay, I've got to raise two little sweeties but also have them know that no means no. So, I've got to be a good listener, got to pay attention. So a lot of guys, I don't know if they know, I mean some of them do. But the ones that I have met have been really stressed and really kind of overwhelmed. Just trying to talk to them and whatever, because I really try to not be stressed about it because people seem to live and do it and I love my kids. If they can do it, then I can do it. So to your question, I see a lot of guys who "ughhghg" wow. It's a different thing.

In many ways, Alan expects that fathers are not ready to accept their position as a stay-at-home father, therefore blocking others who do identify this way. By not accepting this, they feel overwhelmed and struggle with their role as the main care-giver. Traditionally, fathers are not expected to be the main care-giver for their children, therefore they are not

taught how to care for children in the same way women are taught from a young age.

These lack of experiences lead to fathers feeling overwhelmed in their position as at stay-at-home father.

Jude also discusses his lack of experiences with other stay-at-home fathers.

While he does not specifically seek out other stay-at-home fathers, he does feel that those interactions would be helpful.

You know, some. That's kind of been interesting. Obviously I have wanted to see more of that. I think that it's good for society. I mean, why not? I think it's a great thing to see more and more of that. I guess, I hoped that there would be more than I actually saw. It never, I have to say that it never, I ended up taking the kids, in the early days to a lot of play groups or play dates where I would be the only male parent and there would be just moms. But I have to say that every, really, every single situation and every, I've never gotten into a situation where there was a mom who I felt was excluding me. You know, it's really, it's true. Sometimes, you know, the topics of discussion got to the point of where you know they're talking about child birth. There's only so much I can say about that. It's kind of like; this is what our situation is like as far as I know. And so you know, I just kind of nod and don't say much, which is fine.

Although Jude has welcoming experiences with other stay-at-home mothers, he does mention there are times where he can just "kind of nod and [not] say much." Although he says this is "fine," he does wish there was more interaction with other stay-at-home fathers, if not for himself but for others as well.

Different than Jude, Dalton is more frustrated by his lack of interaction with stay-at-home fathers. When asked if he spends any time with other fathers, he responds,

Not for lack of trying. I'm - I'm a lousy grassroots person, I'm not great at getting people involved, organized, I think that there is a - a built in resistance to joining an at-home dads group for many dads because I mean we could have an hour long discussion alone about you know how guy - guys don't like to uh seem weak or ask for help or to need a group or any of that stuff but I think there is a great deal of...um innate resistance to the concept of joining a dads groups so that's my excuse anyway for failing at - at (laughs) at creating a local dads group for me.

Dalton suggests that fathers are not as likely to join a group or talk with other fathers because they are conditioned not to ask for help. Masculinities create expectations for men that it would be considered weak to desire to spend time with others going through similar situations or seek out help from others. Men are socialized to believe that seeking help is not masculine, and therefore constructed as weak. This is exemplified when Grant, who is not involved with any groups for stay-at-home fathers, said, “I never - I hardly ever hang out with other dads.” Although there is a desire for fathers to want to spend time with other stay-at-home fathers, social expectations and pressures get in the way of creating these relationships.

In addition, these differences help these fathers to construct their role as a stay-at-home father as different than the role of the stay-at-home mother. While there may not be large differences between the experiences of stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers, participants construct their role within the home as distinctly different. These fathers struggled with their current situation creating a sense of loneliness, however, other fathers expressed changes in employment and their social group as causes of loneliness and isolation.

CHANGING IDENTITIES

Another aspect participants discuss as influencing their feelings of loneliness and isolation is the change in their social life after becoming a stay-at-home father. All participants worked outside the home before becoming a stay-at-home father and for many participants, this change created less opportunities to socialize with others. Many of these fathers left positions they enjoyed to stay home. Even for fathers who were not

satisfied with their position, enjoyed the adult interaction that is not available to them as stay-at-home fathers.

Kevin, a father of two and former airline pilot, describes this loss in his narrative below.

I didn't actually start feeling loss for about eighteen months. So, I think that was different for me because eighteen months is usually the longest a person, men usually stay out for. 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 it 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.

For Kevin, the loss of socializing with co-workers along with an unknown sense of the future, created struggles for him during his time at home. While he did not initially struggle with his new role, after some time he felt directionless. In this narrative, he criticizes other fathers for viewing staying home as temporary but also admits to struggling with the idea of not returning to work. This narrative both highlights the loss of interaction with co-workers but also the impact Kevin's professional position had on his personal identity. By criticizing other for their struggles and then working through this struggle for himself, Kevin shows how he has power over the situation regardless of his struggle. Deciding that he could let go of the concept of going back to work shows his power while making this decision and is therefore better than those fathers who struggled and ultimately went back to work. Kevin frames fathers who decided to return to the workforce after being home with their children for a short period of time as weak.

Because these fathers desired social interaction and struggled with their role at home, Kevin suggests that he is better because he continued to stay home with his children. In this way, Kevin is showing his strength at persevering through this time of isolation whereas many fathers were unable to stay home long-term.

Carl, a father of an infant daughter and former professor, also shares similar feelings around the loss of his normal routines and ability to socialize with co-workers.

I mean I think that the big thing is how it affects your normal routine, so I was a - a go-to-the-gym-3-days-a-week guy. That is - hopefully that will be back I - I still have yoga on Sundays. I like have to go to yoga or I'll go crazy. But it's also easy on the Sunday to be like "oh I can't do yoga" you know. So it's - my kind of normal routine going out to see bands, going to the bar, like just sort of my normal routine has - but in - in a way it's okay because the trade-off is kind of like the best show in the world right here. But yeah, that's been kind of the biggest thing I didn't expect is how much my normal taken-for-granted routine of life...was just gone - and I could be really disciplined, I could go to the gym late at night or they have daycare at the gym so I could - now that she's a little bit older I could (long pause) um but it takes a little bit more effort and you know the social side too, you know i-is my friends at the bar - there's this bar Bank's down the street I haven't - I have a disk in the jukebox I'm like a regular, they have a drink named the professor named after me. So, you know, that's sort of my circle of uh casual friends is like, you know, it's like a big deal if I even go down there so. I - I think that's the - the part that I didn't think about - I mean it - again, it's a good trade off but um it - has taken a little bit...adjusting to that in terms of my identity.

Carl specifically discusses how his identity has been wrapped up in his normal routine and the struggles with these changes now that he is the main care-giver for his daughter. As a stay-at-home father, he does not have the time or always the desire to do many of the things he used to before she was born. For both Carl and Kevin, their time at home impacts the way they see themselves and how they identify. Sebastian, a father of two and previously a consultant in quality management, simply says, "It's hard to relate to folks," when talking about his role as a stay-at-home father.

In these examples, fathers' discuss their feelings of loneliness in the context of giving up outside work to stay home with their children. Not only does this change create a change in their social experiences but also changes how they understand their own identity. For many of these fathers, it takes time for them to identify as a stay-at-home father. In some cases, fathers never use this term to describe themselves.

NOT FEELING ISOLATED

Despite the majority of participants expressing feelings of loneliness and isolation as stay-at-home fathers, some participants suggest that they do not have the same feelings regarding their experiences at home. Ralph, a father of two and a former health researcher, discusses his attempts to spend time with other stay-at-home fathers. He reveals that he does not desire that relationship.

We tried a couple of times. I'm not an extrovert so I don't feel like I need to. I did it more for Willow. Trying to find a, well with home school you get, you can get a little bit isolated. She had a group that she was part of with her dance school. But we had moved and it was a new dance school. Most of those kids lived thirty or forty miles away because the school was about twenty miles away. We tried to get sort of into a homeschooling social group. Willow is kind of shy and doesn't tend to put herself out for those kinds of things and it never really was successful for her. I never felt the need to. I was happy, you know bringing home a bunch of flour and recipes and making bread. You know I was, well in a lot of ways, would much rather be doing that.

For both Ralph and his daughter, despite recognizing that they were isolated because of his role at home as the stay-at-home father and homeschooling, they did not desire to find relationships with other stay-at-home parents or homeschooled children. When asked if he made connections with other mothers or parents, he responds,

Not really. I mean.... Not really, I mean no, I don't think that there was anything formal. You know, I liked walks so I was in a new place. It's an urban area. It's

a great place to walk. So for me, if Willow was out doing something or if she was in school...Most of the time when she went to ballet school, when she was home, I was with her because I was homeschooling. When she went to ballet school, what I did do was I explored coffee shops, coffee houses. You know I would drop her off and then I would find, you know I should have written a coffee table book about coffee shops because I visited probably, you know a couple dozen coffee shops in the Northern California area at the time. You know, I would just drop her off. She was there for about 2.5, 3 hours so I would go north one time and see what I could find, you know? So that was kind of what I did with my time when I dropped her off. I didn't look for anything in particular. I brought a newspaper with a crossword puzzle. I'd do the crossword puzzle and read the paper and tried their coffee. So that was fun. I really enjoyed that.

Rather than make connections with other parents or stay-at-home fathers, Ralph was content to explore his new city. Although in many ways, he was isolated from other interaction with adults as a stay-at-home father, he did not want to seek out those relationships.

Differently, Celeb's experiences with stay-at-home fathers have created an environment where he feels supported and not isolated. He recognizes that other fathers may not receive the support they need from their family or community but his relationship with other stay-at-home fathers through a local organization creates a supportive community for him.

I do, um I've talked with dads in the past who have gotten negative flak for the decision to stay at home but I, for the most part, have never seen it. It's nice to see the response I get from people um when I talk about staying at home. As far as community, um, I, like I said, I run a stay at home group, in the Raleigh-Durham area. We have got probably 40 to 50 past dads so we'll see that many guy coming through play groups or activities that we do. Our online community is like 80 people on our Facebook discussion page and that's a lot of dads. We won't see them in play groups or at their house but we'll — they'll be active in our online discussions we'll have. The number of guys we have in the group, whether active or not, I think floated now to 270. And that's a fairly inflated number cause a lot of those guys are signed up by a wife or partner and may not have interest in the group but just got signed up um buy somebody that thought they might. So, yeah we've got a huge community of dads in our area that are with each other. It's nice because when we're trying to get play groups together cause like when I first

started staying at home groups were not very welcome to having dads around. So it's nice so the dads coming in don't have to think about that right now. If I am going to get together for a play date in the afternoon, I can just post to the Facebook group, and like if I posted right now, I would probably have two dads come up this afternoon to hang out which is something I've never had before and it's been really cool.

Celeb's involvement with the local stay-at-home father organization creates an avenue to participate in relationships with other fathers who are participating in similar roles with their home. Their shared identity as stay-at-home fathers creates a space for fathers to discuss struggles and issues within the context of other stay-at-home fathers. In addition, by participating in this group, these fathers are able to continue to construct what it means to be a stay-at-home father.

Finally, Jesse also recognizes that other fathers may feel isolated or lonely but suggests that he rarely feels lonely, regardless of the situation.

Yeah. I know that - I know that some...dads are - are dads on - on the blogosphere. They - they write about this feeling of isolation. I don't know, maybe it hasn't been long enough for me or maybe I just don't feel that way at all. Uh...this might also have to do with my um...my experience with my time in China where at some points I was the only Westerner or the only foreigner in town and then uh and then...it would feel pretty isolated as well and some people would get homesick and I - I never met any problems with such feelings and maybe that's why now I don't. Or maybe it will come later. But at this moment I don't feel alone or - or isolated.

Jesse credits his never being met with “any problems with such feelings,” even in other experiences to why he does not feel isolated or lonely now. By comparing himself with other fathers online, he suggests that in some ways he is stronger because he does not need other stay-at-home fathers or interaction with others in his life. Rather, he is content to be at home because he is not lonely. This is an example of how hegemonic masculinities continue to be present and influence the lives of these stay-at-home fathers.

By showing that he does not need interaction with other adults, Jesse demonstrates the control he has over his role as a stay-at-home father. Access to control over their lives is a central concept associated with hegemonic masculinities (Wall and Kristjanson 2005). Fathers' access to control to aspects of their life within the home allows them to participate in characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinities. While Jesse is caring for his children at home, he still holds on to the idea of being stoic and strong. When talking about fathers who find comfort in writing or reading about feelings of isolation "on the blogosphere," Jesse's tone of voice suggests he is judging these fathers for spending time discussing feelings of isolation. He is dismissive of their experiences, suggesting that he is stronger because he does not experience feelings of loneliness and isolation.

CONCLUSION

Throughout these discussions around feelings of isolation and loneliness, fathers continue to build meaning around the stay-at-home father role. In many ways, fathers blame their isolation on their position as the stay-at-home father. Stay-at-home mothers also experience feelings of isolation (Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005); however, participants in this study do not recognize the similarities they share with these stay-at-home mothers. Throughout this chapter, participants continue to construct their role within the home as separate and different from the stay-at-home mother role.

A central theme of this chapter focuses on the perceived differences by participants between stay-at-home fathers and stay-at-home mothers. In many ways, stay-at-home mothers experience similar feelings of isolation and desire for adult

interaction, however, participants construct this need for interaction as weak and selfish when discussing stay-at-home mothers. While many fathers talk about the desire to participate in groups for parents and fathers, they are also quick to criticize stay-at-home mothers for participating in community groups. Participants suggest that these women are more interested in social interaction than caring for their children, a characteristic that sets participants apart from mothers.

Participants who do seek out organizations and community with other parents, tend to focus on groups created for stay-at-home fathers. Several fathers discussed the desire to spend time with other fathers because they believed other fathers would understand their experiences better than stay-at-home mothers. This desire for separation suggests that participants view their role within the home as distinctly different than the role of stay-at-home mothers. Participants' desire to be viewed as stay-at-home fathers rather than associated with mothers reflects how in many ways, they continue to participate in traditional expectations of masculinities. Their rejection of characteristics associated with mothering allows them to associate their role more closely to expectations of fatherhood and masculinities. By suggesting that other parents do not accept them or do not understand their experiences, they further the idea that the role of stay-at-home father is different from the role of stay-at-home mothers.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I have examined how resistance, household labor and isolation influence the experiences of stay-at-home fathers. Throughout this analysis, access to power and privilege have allowed participants to construct a particular narrative of what it means to be a stay-at-home father that is not inclusive for all fathers within the U.S. due to social location. This chapter examines how this study answered the three research questions I set out at the beginning of the project. In addition, this chapter addresses future research and contributions to the current literature around stay-at-home fathers and their families.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Constructing Masculinities

The first research question examined how participants construct their masculinities within the context of staying home. How do stay-at-home fathers construct their masculinities, specifically in relation to their social roles as fathers, partners, and peers? In relation to their social role as fathers, participants construct their masculinities in four ways. First, participants challenged labels that associate themselves with mothers or mothering. By fighting labels such as “Mr. Mom,” participants distanced themselves from femininities and establish themselves as masculine. Second, fathers also rejected care-giving as associated only with mothering. Rather, they are fathers caring for their children. In addition, participants went as far as rejecting stay-at-home mother spaces

such as at-home groups in order to establish themselves as different from stay-at-home mothers. Third, participants constructed their masculinities through fathering by changing what it means to provide for their family. Rather than financially providing, these fathers continued to provide for their family by caring for their children. Finally, despite attempting to change expectations around providing, participants also discussed close ties to outside work regardless of their current working status. Even those participants who do not intend to return to the workforce continued to discuss their past work experiences. Although in some ways different than traditional expectations of fatherhood, participants constructed their masculinities in ways that are similar. They reinterpreted aspects of traditional fatherhood and masculinities so they were consistent with their construction of their stay-at-home father identities.

Participants also constructed their masculinities in relation to their role as partners. Particularly within this research, participants used the division of household labor as a way to construct their masculinities within the context of their relationship. Through rejection of some gendered tasks such as laundry, these stay-at-home fathers established gendered boundaries within their partnerships, a finding consistent with William's (1993) conclusions. In addition, discussions around the decision to stay home were framed as decisions made either with their partner or on their own. In these discussions, fathers asserted their power within the relationship by claiming at least partial control over the decision to stay home. Also, by attributing this decision as economic or the best option for their family and not because they would be the best at care-giving, they distanced themselves from characteristics traditionally associated with femininities.

Participants distanced themselves from relationships and interactions with other stay-at-home mothers. For some, this rejection of relationships with other stay-at-home mothers was a reaction to feelings of being unwelcome in mother-centered spaces. For other participants, this rejection of relationships with other stay-at-home mothers was constructed as a way to show their own proficiency at being the main care-giving parent. By rejecting these relationships and those aspects of care-giving viewed as feminine, these fathers construct their role at home as masculine.

Fathers, frame interactions with strangers or family who challenged their stay-at-home status as unimportant. If questioned by strangers about their role at home, many times they did not respond nor correct others. Because they care more about their ongoing interactions or relationships, they did not make an effort to correct those who consistently part of their social group or community. In family relationships, another man usually would be the one to question participants' role at home and assert their belief that participants were not living up to the breadwinning expectation associated with both fatherhood and manhood. In these situations, participants suggested that it is the family member who is struggling or feels uncomfortable with their masculinities. They believed that these men are the ones who are either hyper-masculine or have antiquated ideas of masculinities. By doing this, participants asserted that they are in fact conforming more closely to expectations of masculinities.

Participants' interactions with their partners, families, and communities all helped shape their stay-at-home father identities and construction of masculinities. Fathers' construction of gender was dynamic and situational, consistent with West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender." Fathers did not construct one unified

stay-at-home father identity; rather these constructions were fluid. Despite the homogenous nature of the sample, social location also influenced participants' access to privileges associated with traditional notions of masculinities. Consistent with Connell and Messerschmitt's (2005) work around hegemonic masculinities, participants had different experiences with their partners, families and communities based on their social location, despite their positions as stay-at-home fathers. These different experiences were then reflected in the differing constructions of masculinities by these stay-at-home fathers.

Negotiation of Household Labor

The focus of the second research question was the negotiation of household labor. Is the negotiation of household labor, including care work and household tasks, in these families a reflection of shifting gender roles in the home where the primary caregiver is the father? In some ways, participants highlighted shifts in gender roles within their homes. Participants in this study were the main care-giver for their children and undertake many of the responsibilities associated with care work while their partners work. In most cases this also involved taking their children to doctor appointments and other social engagements. In addition, participants also did the majority of the household labor. For some participants this also included coordinating household labor with paid employees.

While in many ways, these participants challenged household labor gender expectations, in some ways they continued to negotiate tasks along traditionally gendered lines. Participants continued to be responsible for outside work which is traditionally

associated as masculine tasks. These tasks included house repairs, gardening and caring for the yard. In addition, participants tended to shy away from some traditionally feminine tasks including laundry and planning for the family. These tasks continued to be the responsibility of their female partners. Overall, there were some shifts in gender roles within these families around household labor. Unlike previous work within the context of heterosexual relationships (Coltrane 2000, Lam et al. 2012, Kroska 2004), these fathers did take on the responsibility for the majority of the household labor. Fathers were also more responsible for the overall care for their children unlike previous work with families (Lyn 2006). However, the shift was not complete. Gender continued to play a role in how household tasks, particularly laundry and repair work, are divided within these families.

Social Location and Intersecting Identities

The final research question addressed the ways social location and intersecting identities influence the ways in which fathers construct their stay-at-home identity. In what ways does social location and intersecting identities influence the ways in which fathers construct this stay-at-home identity? The sample for this research consists of almost all professional, white, and married fathers. In addition, participants became fathers later in life compared to the average age of fathers at the birth of their first child in the U.S., giving them time to experience working outside of the home before staying home. These aspects gave participants access to power and privilege within the U.S. not available to all men. Because of this, many of these participants have not been in situations where their role or presence has been questioned. As stay-at-home fathers,

participants were sometimes challenged because they are men taking on a traditionally feminine role. Specifically, participants were not welcomed into mother-centered groups because of their gender, creating a situation that was new to many of these fathers. In this study, the majority of participants are white, well-educated and married to women. These aspects of their social identities create both power and privilege in the United States, allowing for very few experiences where participants would feel unwelcome by the majority within a group.

Participants' social location allowed these fathers to continue to have access to power associated with being white, professional class and married despite not working outside the home. Participants were not only able to challenge those who questioned their role at home, they were also able to create new organizations for other fathers similar to themselves. Because they have the time, money and transportation, they were able to find other stay-at-home fathers outside of their own community. In addition, several fathers discussed their ability to participate in the national at-home dad convention which required having the resources to leave their family and travel to another state for a three-day convention. Finally, experiencing access to power and privilege influenced how these fathers resist certain labels like babysitting and "Mr. Mom." Participants had the resources and time to participate in campaigns to end these terms that is not always accessible to other groups of men from different social locations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The sample used in this study highlighted the access to power and privilege of this group of fathers and examined how both power and privilege influence their construction

of the role of the stay-at-home father. The sample population of this study was made up of participants who are all married to women who work outside the home and are the main breadwinner for their family. The majority of the sample was white and better educated than the average man in the U.S. Although men of color and men in same-sex relationships were recruited for this study, few men of color and no men in same-sex relationships participated. While this research was limited by the characteristics of the sample and cannot make comparisons within the study around race or sexuality, it did allow for a unique opportunity to analyze how power and privilege influences how these men constructed the role of the stay-at-home father. For participants in this study, their position as a white man within the U.S. created few instances where their position is challenged. As a stay-at-home father, many of these men have experienced being questioned or not allowed in a particular space because of their status as a man. By having a homogenous sample, I was able to examine how participants' reactions are influenced by their access to power and privilege.

Future research should also include more interviews with a diverse group of fathers to add to the discussion of power and privilege in this study. Although steps were used to include a more diverse group of fathers, the language used to describe the study or the focus on fatherhood may have discouraged some fathers from participating. While I did not only use the term "stay-at-home father" but included terms such as "main care-giver," the scope of the study may have discouraged fathers who do not see themselves as the main care-giver despite caring for their children for the majority of the time. Fathers may have seen their time at home as temporary and did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences. This future research is important because it highlights the larger population

of stay-at-home fathers than currently is reported by the U.S. Census and other reports. Not only is there a larger population of fathers who stay home and care for their children, their experiences may be more varied than is currently represented.

In addition, including fathers in same-sex relationships along with fathers who are single or cohabitating may add more to our understanding of changing gender expectations around care-giving and household labor. In this study, I examined how gender roles are challenged in heterosexual married couple families. Including a more diverse sample of family formations would allow for further discussions around gendered expectations.

Finally, longitudinal research with stay-at-home fathers would also shed light on several aspects of how fathers identify and construct their role as a stay-at-home father. As fathers continue in their role as a stay-at-home father or return to work part time or full time, longitudinal research would highlight the complex nature of this role and care-giving. It could also help examine how gendered tasks change over time within these families. Longitudinal research would also allow for more analysis of the changes for these fathers and families when the father re-enters the workforce.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This study contributes to current research about stay-at-home fathers in several ways. First, this research questions how these stay-at-home fathers both challenge and conform to gendered expectations. By giving up some or all outside work to stay home to care for their children, participants challenged traditional expectations for fathers. Rather than focusing on breadwinning and economically supporting their family, these

fathers prioritized caring for their children while their female partners work outside the home (Smith 2009). In this way, they challenged current tenets of traditional fatherhood. However, in many ways these fathers continued to participate in normalized expectations around fatherhood and masculinities. Fathers compared themselves to mothers, suggesting that they play rougher with their children and encourage them to explore than mothers. Fathers also allowed more distance and encourage their children to take physical chances that may endanger themselves that mothers would not allow. Encouraging their children to explore and take chances is constructed as positive aspects of parenting that is missing when mothers are the main care-giver. Participants suggested that they do this because they are fathers, distinguishing themselves as separate and in some ways as better than stay-at-home mothers. In addition, participants' discussions and frustrations of terms like "Mr. Mom" or babysitting highlighted how fathers were resisting terms that associate them with being feminine. They were creating a role that is masculine and specifically for fathers. Through the analysis of how fathers were also conforming to traditional expectations of masculinities and fatherhood, this research is contributing to the current literature on stay-at-home fathers.

This research also furthers the current discussion around stay-at-home fathers by examining the father's decision to stay home. Previous research (Chesley 2011, Doucet 2006) have mainly focused on the economic factors that influence fathers' decision to stay home. While this research addressed economic reasons for staying home, participants in this study also provided other reasons for making this choice. Fathers suggested that the desire to control their children's environment by caring for them full time at home is best for their children and a strong factor in the decision to stay home.

Also within this research, I examined how fathers construct the factors that influence the change from working outside the home for income to caring for their children as a decision. Regardless if participants actually made the decision to stay home or were laid off, staying home was framed as a decision. This framing of the decision highlighted how fathers conformed to ideals of masculinities by claiming control over their environment. This aspect is another way this project furthers the current understanding of stay-at-home fathers.

Also, this research highlighted the complexities of how stay-at-home fathers negotiated the division of household labor with their female partners. In this study, participants suggested that they take on the majority of the household labor, however, there are aspects of this labor that is still gendered. For many fathers, traditionally feminine tasks such as laundry were rejected. Many fathers claimed they are unable to successfully launder clothes, particularly feminine clothing. By rejecting this particular task as feminine, these men were not challenging traditional expectations around gender. In addition, participants also took care of the majority of the outside work, including yard care and repairs. Both the rejection of some tasks and taking care of others showed how these fathers continued to conform to some expectations. However, in many ways these fathers challenged gendered expectations by taking on most of the household work, including care work. Overall, there are several aspects of this research that contributes to the current discussion around stay-at-home fathers.

IMPLICATIONS

One aspect that was reiterated several times by participants in this study was the desire to be recognized as both fathers and care-givers. Not only did participants want to be valued as the main care-giver of their child or children, they want to also be recognized as fathers and men. This recognition is important for stay-at-home fathers but also important for their children and families. By recognizing these fathers as the main care-giver, we also help support their children and partners. Supporting fathers who stay home with their children gives mothers the opportunity to focus on their career. Creating opportunities for fathers to care for their children provides women more opportunities to pursue careers with possibly less pressure around care-giving. This support also opens more opportunities for varying roles within the family and possibly creating changing expectations for children around gender.

Moving forward, we can value fathers as care-givers in several ways. At an individual level, it is important to stop making comments referring to fathers as babysitters or temporarily caring for their children. Regardless of their role as the main care-giver, it is important to value fathers' participation in the lives of their children beyond the occasional afternoon or trip to the store. The use of terms that suggest that fathers are not active participants in the lives of their children continue to confirm gendered expectations around parenting.

Another way to value fathers as the main care-givers is by creating more inclusive language for parents in places like schools and through social services. Rather than assuming that mothers are solely responsible for the daily lives of their children, it is important to recognize the roles that fathers play in their children's lives as well. The use

of language that includes both fathers and mothers creates the opportunity to acknowledge different family formations that may or may not include mothers or fathers.

Finally, it is important to recognize and value fathers as care-givers on a governmental level. Currently, the U.S. Census has a very narrow definition for stay-at-home fathers, leaving out a significant number of fathers who are responsible for the majority of the care of their children. Beyond recognition, inclusive language around parenting would create a more comprehensive representation of family structure and parenting. Also, important for stay-at-home fathers is to recognize their role within the family during court cases. By not always expecting that fathers are the main provider for the family could create a better understanding of family structures within the court system as well.

CONCLUSION

Through discussions of their daily lives and their experiences as stay-at-home fathers, participants in this study highlighted the ways they construct their identities around masculinities, fatherhood and care-giving. While fathers continued to conform to some aspects gendered expectations, in many ways they are also challenging what it means to be a father. Despite their struggles and tensions surrounding their role within the home, participants spoke highly of their job as the stay-at-home father for their family. Benjamin directly spoke to this when asked if he would recommend staying home to other fathers. He responded,

Absolutely. I would totally recommend this to other fathers. I think it's a great way to really engage with not only with your baby and watch their development but also with yourself. [It's] an opportunity to work on some challenges. The fast

and easiest way to make a big change if you want to strengthen certain areas is to stay at home with your baby.

Despite its challenges, he believed staying home is a great opportunity and a way to grow as a father and person. Benjamin not only recommended staying home but encourages other fathers to do the same.

Throughout narratives and conversations with these stay-at-home fathers was this sense of opportunity and love for their role within the home. Fathers talked positively about their time with their children and continued to encourage other fathers to also commit to staying home with their children.

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