Work Across the Generations: Communication Narratives of Stay-at-Home Fathers in Early and Middle Adulthood

Alice L. Jones
Old Dominion University

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WORK ACROSS THE GENERATIONS: COMMUNICATION NARRATIVES OF
STAY-AT-HOME FATHERS IN EARLY AND MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

by

Alice L. Jones
M.S. May 1986, Miami University
B.S. August 1984, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Approved by:

__________________________
Thomas Socha (Director)

__________________________
Gary Beck (Member)

__________________________
E. James Baesler (Member)
The notion of work whether it is done inside or outside the home represents a complex and shifting pattern of social relationships, gender role identities, and ideologies. For an increasing numbers of men, who represent the population of fathers labeled as “stay-at-Home Dad” [SAHD] or “stay-at-home father” [SAHF], these changes have created special challenges, controversies, and raised questions about cultural expectations concerning the transition from that of a stigmatized role to that of a “new, involved father” (Eranta & Moisander, 2011; Rochlen, 2008). Increased participation by men in roles that challenge traditional and long standing gender role norms and expectations also challenges how men and women behave, and how popular culture speaks to our understanding of stay-at-home fathers and the communication challenges they face. The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the communicative discourse of contemporary stay-at-home fathers (SAHF) and the resulting narratives in relation to their roles as men, fathers, and workers.

Using a Grounded Theory Approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), narratives of stay-at-home fathers were gathered through personal interviews and evaluated using constant comparative methodology involving multiple readings of the transcribed interviews. This process was used to identify common themes and categories in order to better understand and identify how men in various lifespan stages talk about and view their roles as stay-at-
home fathers. Specifically, how do ideas of work, its meanings and values translate into their conversations and their families’ lived experiences as well as how do they perceive concepts of gender, work and family that frame the communicative discourse of stay-at-home fathers?

Contrary to previous research that viewed stay-at-home fathers as a homogeneous group, results of this study indicate there are in fact distinct differences. Specifically this study’s results support a new grounded, classification scheme that arranges SAHFs along a continuum of the degree of acceptance of the SAHF role. That is, the data suggests at least four types of stay-at-home fathers that vary in the extent to which they embrace the role from high to low level of role embracing: Revolutionary Stay-at Home Father, Reformer Stay-at Home Father, Reluctant Stay-at-Home Father, and Resentful Stay-at-Home Father as well as common narratives used by the fathers in the stay-at-home role to help negotiate the balance between their role as stay-at-home father and issues of gender, identity, work, and family. Finally, implications of this study for future research seeking to examine the impact of stay-at-home fathers on resulting communication patterns within families, particularly in regard to spouses/partners and children are discussed.
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“I believe that what we become depends on what our fathers teach us at odd moments, when they aren't trying to teach us. We are formed by little scraps of wisdom.”

— Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Dock Edward Harris and all of the fathers who are present and available for their children.
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For all those people I have not listed directly who through this process have inspired me, encouraged me, listened, advised and pushed me, who had confidence in my ability when I did not and stood with me when I wanted to give up, thank you. My lessons learned from you are that it is important to acknowledge my uniqueness, while continuing to always give it my best and even if I fail, what I have been able to accomplish will only better prepare me for what’s to come. Never give up, and if you happen to fall, there will be people there to help pick you up and reset you on the path to accomplishing your goals and dreams. Thank you all!
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CHAPTER I
OVERVIEW

The topic of “work” is ever-present in adults’ conversations. In after-work social gatherings, in conversations during family meals, and in many other communication contexts, interpersonal interactions about work are commonplace. In addition to devoting considerable time to talking about “work,” adults also often view a wide variety of narratives about “work” on television (e.g., *The Office*) and in films (e.g., *9 to 5*). For example, many television shows from the 1950's through the 1970's depicted representations of everyday family life that included someone working, either through explicit depictions of being “on the job,” or implied “post-working” activities. Alongside these kinds of shows targeted towards adults there were cartoons (e.g., *The Flintstones*, and *The Jetsons*) targeted to children that also may play a role in modeling “work” and values related to working. For example, in the 1950’s male characters, primarily fathers, left home for “work” while mothers and other female characters primarily “worked” at home. Even if the father and in some cases the mother worked outside of the home it wasn't always clear what this elusive thing “work” was, nor exactly what they did while they were there. More recent television shows such as *Friends*, *The Office*, and *Are We There Yet*, as well as animated shows like *Family Guy* also introduce “work” in some fashion, but the focus and the emphasis from our traditional models based on households made up of the working father outside of the home, a homemaker mother and one or more children may be different (Higgins, 1992). Whether face-to-face or mediated, communicating about work, along with many cultural, social, educational,
and economic factors, plays an important role in decisions we all make related to careers and jobs.

During the twenty-first century there have been major changes in home and work roles and responsibilities of both men and women. For example, changing demographics and social norms create the need for alternative and non-traditional representations of gender, family, and “work” in order for the family unit to function effectively (Hochschild, 1997; Morin, 2013; Rochlen, Suizzo & McKelley, 2008). Also, there is a greater prevalence of dual-income families, where more women are earning higher incomes than spouses, accompanied by a decline of jobs for skilled workers, global corporate relocation, and the discontent of middle managers (see Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000; Harrington, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014; United States Department of Labor, 2014). Men are increasingly obligated to confront their dependence on the workplace as a way to demonstrate their masculine identity (Fasteau, 1974; Kimmel, 2006). In this regard, the notion of “work” whether it is done inside or outside the home represents another complex and shifting pattern of social relationships, gender role identities, and ideologies about our understandings of “work”, and its relation to daily life.

Although there have been numerous studies of working outside the home, in the field of communication, like other fields that study work (e.g., sociology), the primary focus has been on communication and traditional working roles (e.g., employer-employee) as well as traditional work settings (e.g., corporations, institutions). As communication about work clearly spans into other facets of everyday living, a more comprehensive description and understanding of work and working as they take place
across a wide range of contexts is needed. In order to address the gap in the literature about communication and work, this thesis reports a qualitative study that sought to better understand the communicative discourse of the understudied familial/societal role of stay-at-home fathers (SAHF). In particular, the study focused on stay-at-home fathers’ narratives in order to better understand how they construct their own identities as “men,” “fathers,” and “workers.” Using a grounded theory approach, the study examined the narratives of stay-at-home fathers to better understand and identify how men in various lifespan stages talk about and view their roles as stay-at-home fathers, how ideas of work, its meaning and value are translated into conversations and the families lived experiences, and how perceived concepts of gender, work and family frame the communicative discourse of stay-at-home fathers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualizing Stay-at-Home-Fathers

Stay-at-home fathers are men who by choice or circumstance have become the primary caregivers for their children. These men represent a diversity of backgrounds, and situations and include men who have lost their jobs, men who work out of their homes, as well as men who work part time outside of the home (Doucet, 2004). Although research on stay-at-home fathers is limited, what there is generally originates in areas related to Psychology, Sociology and gender studies, and supports that these men and their families face a range of judgments and consequences related to their decisions.
to work at home as the primary provider of care for their children (see Harrington, 2012; Latshaw, 2009; Solomon, 2014).

In light of the arguments that caretaking, or nurturing and loving is not an innate, biological phenomenon, that it is constructed to be a “feminine skill” but rather a “natural ability” acquired though experience (Latshaw, 2009; Wall, Aboim, & Marinho, 2007), there is a tendency to reduce men in the caregiving role to a set of characteristics, distorted by the implication that all members of a particular sex are alike in basic respects (Wood, 2003). In their roles as caregivers, these men are called upon to perform tasks like meal preparation and planning, cleaning, personal care (bathing, changing, dressing), coordinating daily activities and providing emotional and social support for their children (Russell, 2007). These are tasks and responsibilities that have been traditionally considered “women’s work” (Russell, 2007, p.2). Harrington (2012) suggests that changes in the American family and generalizations about men, masculinity, fatherhood, and their roles within families are behind the change in the visibility and consistency of the message that the American father isn’t who he used to be, and issues a challenge to our views of gender roles and fatherhood, as well as our understanding of the fathers’ role as caregiver and the impact of these changes on fathers in the workplace and at home. This provides a warrant for further study of the conceptual underpinnings of the concept of SAHF and its surrounding discourses, that is research grounded in the actual discourse of SAHF’s.

Grounded Theory

One of the most influential models for analyzing qualitative data is through a grounded theory approach (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). This methodology originated with
Glaser and Strauss (1967) and their work on the interactions between health care professionals and dying patients. The main feature is the development of new theory through the collection and analysis of data about a phenomenon. It goes beyond the philosophical investigation of the experience as it is perceived, and focuses on the nature of what is, primarily because the explanations that emerge are genuinely new knowledge and are used to develop new theories about the particular phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach is important because it provides for the emergence of theory “grounded in” the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded. The categories are developed using a constant comparative method, which is an ongoing process of comparing pieces of data with each other while the codes, categories and category definitions change dynamically as new data alters the scope and terms of the framework of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof, 2011). This method of analysis is concerned with generating plausible suggestions of many categories, properties and hypotheses about general problems rather than tentatively testing for possible solutions or causes. Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose that since no proof is involved, the constant comparative method requires only the “saturation of data as opposed to the consideration of all available data” (p.104). Neither, are the data restricted to one kind of clearly defined situation. This saturation of data can be defined as (a) the point at which no new or relevant data seems to emerge for identified categories; (b) no new categories are emerging; (c) the relationships between the categories are well established and validated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical saturation is an important part of this process in that by not reaching this point of saturation the resulting theory is conceptually inadequate (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
The Constant Comparative Method

The Constant Comparative method involves four stages: comparing incidents, integrating categories and their properties, defining the theory and writing the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method is a perpetual process with each stage transforming into the next throughout the process of analysis providing an ongoing development of new data (codes, categories and definitions) that alter the scope and terms of the analytic framework (Lindlof, 2011).

The first stage of development of a grounded model involves comparing incidents and coding the data for as many groupings as possible as categories or data emerge that fit an already existing category. This coding process involves making notations for each question across each of the individual interviews and comparing each with the other to identify common themes and ideas. During this phase of analysis, two kinds of analytic coding are used. “Open Coding” involves going through the texts line by line and categorizing portions of data based on its “coherent meaning”—it’s standing on its own (Lindlof, 2011, p. 250 – 251). It is through this process that categories are built, named, and ascribed attributes. The goal of open coding is to expose new avenues of discovery. The second kind of coding, “in vivo coding” refers to the method of coding the terms derived from interviews, or ethnographic conversations that are used by social actors to characterize their own scene (Lindlof, 2011, p. 251). This identification of language can be used to serve as category names and exemplars for the research narrative. These two processes can potentially go on indefinitely as definitions of categories are refined and begin to be differentiated one from another. At this point, a code book is created that documents the coding system and the procedures for applying them. The main purpose
of the code book is to catalogue the category definitions and the codes for identifying each one as well as examples of text from interview transcripts for each grouping or classification. (Lindlof, 2011)

The next two stages of integrating and defining dimensions involve the process of reshaping the categories and producing deeper meaning by making connections between categories and their identifying properties and constructs or attributes along a continuum (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof, 2011). Integration involves making connections between categories and looking for conditions that cause, or are related to the context, specific properties or behaviors and how the consequences or strategies are managed or handled (Lindlof, 2011). Defining dimensions is one of the final steps in the process of coding, categorizing and developing conceptualizations. This is accomplished by examining and reexamining each idea in reference to the incidents that make up the construct to tease out key variations or the dimensions of the particular incident (Lindlof, 2011). At the point where new data adds little or no value the category set is said to be “theoretically saturated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.110).

Previous research on stay-at-home fathers has employed primarily the use of surveys and less so qualitative methods including interviewing and observations (see Fischer, 2010; Harrington, 2012; Latshaw, 2009). Grounded Theory is needed as a way of generating thinking about and the conceptualization of data gathered through the research process. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that grounded theory is a reaction to positivism, meaning that laws are understood as social rules that are valid because they are endorsed by authority or derived logically from existing decisions. They suggest that
researchers can achieve a theory that is meaningful in certain contexts from observations and consensus.

In order to address some of the complex social issues surrounding identity and self-concept, and inquiries asking “why” about the socially constructed ideology of stay-at-home fatherhood, using grounded theory methodology provides a means of understanding more deeply the transitioning of the men in this understudied population of fathers to roles at home.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

For the estimated 550,000 fathers, representing about 3.5% of all married couples with children who over the past decade, are reported to represent the growing population of fathers labeled as “Stay-at-Home Dads” [SAHD] or “Stay-at-Home Fathers” [SAHF] (Morin, 2013), societal changes have created challenges and controversy with respect to questions asked about the cultural expectations of this “new, involved father” (Eranta & Moisander, 2011; Rochlen, 2008). This increased participation by men in roles that challenge traditional and long-standing gendered role norms and expectations also challenge how men and women behave, and how popular culture speaks to our understanding of stay-at-home fathers and the communication challenges they face.

Despite evolving gender roles, and more women working in and pursuing high-status, time-consuming, professional careers, The United States is a society that has been culturally indoctrinated to see men as primary economic providers (Fasteau, 1974). Though we might like to think that our roles as men and women have become straightforward enough to exchange mom for dad or dad for mom, it is not quite that simple. While stay-at-home fathers may be in some arenas praised for their enlightened self-confidence, cultural respect is another matter. Popular movies and television shows broadcast over the past thirty years like Mr. Mom (1983), Mrs. Doubtfire (1993), Daddy Daycare (2003), Guys with Kids (2012), See Dad Run (2012) and Tio Papi (2013) as well as news commentaries, stay-at-home father blogs and other new media bring the idea of
the stay-at-home father to the mainstream public view, and at some levels, possibly potentially help create an atmosphere of increased acceptance.

There are competing discourses between common popular media representations of the stay-at-home father that continue to reinforce the model of the stereotypical incompetent father while at the same time supporting gender practices that support the dominant social position of hegemonic masculinity and the reality of fathers who by choice or circumstance are designated as the at home parent—"stay-at-home father". These representations play on tensions created by competing societal ideologies, media imagery and family relationships that demonstrate practices that suggest exemplifications that men can draw on to craft "manhood acts," defined by Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) as behaviors aimed at claiming privilege, eliciting deference, and resisting exploitation as signs of masculinity. These themes and variations of masculine identity allow for the construction of representations of fathers in various ways in the media, in the workplace and within family units.

The Ideology of Manhood

Parenting and work are gendered constructs examined within the social network of gender, work, family relationships, and identity. The ideology of manhood is socially and culturally constructed and continuously played out, acted upon, reasserted and redefined over time, and the desire for men to be viewed as masculine affects all areas of our society (Kimmel, 2006; Vavrus, 2002). These themes and variations of masculine identity allow for the construction and representation of men in a number of ways, and that masculinity is not something singular, but plural (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Thus, these variations have come to be taken as evidence of multiple masculinities, for
example, Black, Latino, Gay, or working class masculinities and show how males can compensate or modify their “manhood acts” or behaviors attributed to men. The view taken here focuses attention on what “males do to create, maintain, and claim membership in a dominant gender group, and implies a claim that “all manhood acts suggest membership in the privileged gender group” (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009, p.284). The multiple masculinities concept argues Schrock & Schwalbe (2009) is helpful in seeing how “various groups of men are able to emphasize aspects of the hegemonic ideals as means to construct effective manhood acts”(p.284).

Popular culture representations present an artificial standard of masculinity associated with stigmatized others (Harrington, 2012, Petroski, 2006). There exist a number of inconsistencies in societies views of fatherhood presented in these media that create assumptions about fathers working inside and outside of the home. In my assessment, fathers filling the stay at home role, as represented by characters in movies and television programs, are often stereotyped as fathers who due to a personal and/or economic circumstances, particularly, loss of position as primary provider, are forced to take on the heretofore stigmatized roles (for men) of primary caregivers and homemakers. These fathers are portrayed as being uncomfortable in their new role, and generally viewed by their peers, and the larger community as incompetent in managing the responsibilities of home and child care. They are also seen as inferior in providing the same level of care and daily home management as their spouses, or mothers who stay at home.

The Social Construction of Work

The structuration perspective defined by Giddens (1984) is the process by which
social systems are produced and reproduced through members’ use of rules and resources which offer a framework for looking at how individuals make sense of their lives in conjunction with their work. The structuration approach applied to family interaction and work focuses not only on the surface level family functions and behaviors, but also on the patterns and types of family dynamics (e.g., closeness, power, rules and roles). Along with the structure comes human agency (Giddens, 1984) and the assumption that the family members, or individuals concerned are skilled and knowledgeable individuals capable of monitoring their activities as they engage in social interactions. Through the socialization process individuals establish routines that provide an existence that supports a sense of security and safety within their particular environments. Family members create structures that may seem unique to their particular family system, but are "appropriated by the family from pre-existing social institutions, such as economic, political, religious, cultural institutions" (Giddens, 1984, p. 298) For example, in a family that has rules for behavior that discourage publically showing negative emotions or feelings, or require that men and boys should be served first, and women and girls are responsible for all domestic chores might find that the basis for these family rules are not directly related to the immediate family, but passed from parent to child and represent culturally, or religiously founded guidance. These institutional features operate as norms that guide behaviors and judgments for the family regarding how members interpret, conceptualize and communicate about work in relation to their family system and the greater society. As society and its values change our depictions of work and its place in our lives also change. These changes influence how individuals learn, speak and practice work and family, and navigate the balance between the two.
The place and value of work in the life of an individual changes over the lifespan, and continues to change as a construct in our society over time. There has been a shift from the production of goods to the provision of service, and the automation of production in those goods producing industries (Goldstein, 1984). Borow (1984) asserts that the character and stability of any society cannot be understood without understanding how society prepares and positions its human resources. Work, then, is considered a prominent and highly institutionalized feature of our society, and must be accommodated through our socialization process (Borow, 1984; Ciulla, 2000). Work is accepted as, for the majority of the adults in our population, something that plays a prominent role in contributing to life satisfaction and sense of personal worth. It is recognized and written about by scholars from a variety of educational, sociological, psychological, and communicative perspectives (Ciulla, 2000; Jablin, 1985; Lucas et al., 2006).

Depending on the circumstances, every aspect of work takes on a particular meaning, not only in regard to the particular work tasks, but also the schedules and relationships between the workers and their employers (Salaman, 1997). Shared meanings help to differentiate what is considered work from non-work and the significance of work activities and relationships as they vary over time and cultural context (Salaman, 1997). Buzzanell and Lucas (2012) and Ciulla (2000) highlighted, in their separate research on choice, identity, dignity and work roles in peoples’ lives that society has evolved in such a way that work has become a predominant social construct. Because of the importance of work in people’s lives it begins to take on special meaning for individuals' overall sense of identity and self-worth.
Although there is much variability in the quality of different kinds of work, it is not work itself but the reasons why people work that are lasting. Four values have been identified as related to the primary reasons for work (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2012). These values—meaningful work, leisure, money, and security—shape how people make choices about work and career. These reasons can be considered discursive frames by which people craft their stories related to work (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2012). Drawing meaning and identity from work can potentially fuel a greater sense of ethical, sustainable work patterns as well as a stronger level of engagement and motivation for work and its pleasures and meaning in one’s life.

Social Constructionism and Fatherhood

Fatherhood in the United States has become a topic of scholarly interest driven by social and cultural changes in the image of fatherhood, and the changes in men’s behavior as fathers (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2004). Fatherhood is a social construction dependent on a historical and cultural background. Variations on meaning of “good father” shift over time and take on diverse forms in response to cultural and institutional changes (Lamb, 1998; Pleck, 1997). The “new fatherhood” (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Harrington, 2012; Petroski, 2006) ideal, developed as a result of qualitative and quantitative studies, is characterized by fathers who are more intimate, active, compassionate and involved in the lives of their children. However, popular culture and images in the media characterize these contemporary fathers in ways that are changing the “culture of fatherhood” (Petroski, 2006) exemplified by shared norms and beliefs and the “conduct of fatherhood” (Petroski, 2006), men’s actual behaviors. Viewing fatherhood through
this same constructionist lens, fathers’ discourses and practices about their identities can be better understood within their life contexts.

The dynamics of fathering and family functioning explored by considering the interrelationships between men as fathers, partners and breadwinners show a diversity of fatherhood patterns related to how these men understand and live their lives as fathers (Wall, Aboim, & Marinho, 2007). These patterns represent a range from fathers and who are closely joined and play a supportive role within the family to fathers who are more disengaged, and are shaped by how closely matched are practices and ideals of gender equality and individual autonomy (Wall, Aboim, & Marinho, 2007). There is an assumption that there is a distinction between men who are “fathers” and those who are not. Considering some of the social changes in marriage, divorce, and remarriage that have complicated families and men’s ties to children, the definition of what and who a father is has changed (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2004). To be father in a traditional sense suggests a “set of responsibilities ranging from providing economic support, disciplining children, and serving as a role model” (as cited by Eggebeen and Knoester, 2004, p. 391). Whether the father is a biological father, a stepfather, foster father, or some other male taking on the role and responsibility of nurturing, disciplining, supporting and serving as a role model for children in the family, there are similarities in how they influence “socialization, participation in informal groups or activities, involvement in community groups, and work behavior” (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2004, p. 390). The level of involvement through social connections, family ties and work lives of these father figures with their children has also been found to have lasting positive consequences for both (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2004; Medved et al., 2006).
Familial Relationships

Families are the building blocks of society, and as such are responsible for socializing children and preparing them to be the next generation of citizens. Families also contribute to the development of the next generation through both obvious and deliberate as well as subtle and unconscious instruction in and communication about gender identity and the development of internal working models of beliefs and expectations (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). These models of beliefs influence cognitive and behavioral development across the lifespan (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Thus, interactions and attachments between parents and children within the family system serve as an important influence on children’s development (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006).

Although much of the research has focused on interactions with mothers, there has been some research focused on father child interactions, as well as ways in which various parts of the family system such as the quality of the marital relationship impacts a father’s interactional sensitivity to infants/children (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006).

During early stages of development children are in similar states of dependence and identify with the person who takes care of them which is in many cases the mother (Wood, 2003). This early identification implies that as children begin to develop their individual gender identities, interactions with their primary caregiver play a major role. Wood (2003) argues that for girls, development proceeds along the path initially established by the mother through daily interactions, and the daughter develops her sense of self within that primary relationship. For sons to develop their masculine gender identity, they must sever the early identification with the mother and replace it with identification with a male, generally the father. Traditionally, this process is more
complicated for boys because fathers can be less physically present in boys’ everyday lives. Wood (2003) also argues that because boys typically lack a concrete, personal relationship with the person they are supposed to emulate, their concept of masculine gender identity may be harder for them to grasp. This then can provide a plausible explanation for why boys define their masculinity in more negative terms based on what it is not—"not feminine, not like mother", and repress the original identification with mothers denying anything feminine in them (Wood, 2003 p.64).

Masculine gender identity is based on differentiating from a female caregiver and defining self as "not like her" (Wood, 2003, p.67). Boys and men who have developed their sense of identity based on this premise have more of a tendency to establish identity boundaries that separate them from everyone else and they tend to find security in self-sufficiency and autonomy (Wood, 2003). While on the other hand, Townsend (2002) asserts that as the position of fatherhood is rooted in a system of kinship, it is also fixed in a gender system, and within the nuclear family fatherhood and motherhood are gendered forms of parenthood, with different expectations, activities and identities. Further, he argues that as a gendered relationship, fatherhood is expressed differently between sons and daughters, and the primary experience that men bring to fatherhood is their own experience of being fathered.

**Relationships and Power**

Wood (2003) cites a number of researchers and clinicians who argue that both personal freedom and meaningful relationships with others are two of the basic needs of humans. The primary difference between the sexes is dependent on how much independence and connection each individual wants and how they coordinate these
preferences with their partners. Wood (2003) argues that masculine individuals tend to want greater autonomy and less connection than feminine individuals. In relationships the desire for different degrees of personal freedom and connection can cause friction in close relationships. Men tend to be socialized toward independence and while women have been more traditionally socialized toward more close relationships (Wood, 2003). Interestingly, this pattern is less obvious in gay and lesbian relationships in which both partners tend to have more similar desires for independence and meaningful connections in relationships (Wood, 2003).

Relationships also involve a distribution of power between partners, which often reflects gendered patterns. These societal views suggest that women are less powerful than men which can carry over into intimate relationships (Wood, 2003).

**Fathers, Sons and Daughters**

William Pollack (1998) in his book *Real Boys* challenges conventional expectations about manhood and masculinity. He says “Fathers are not male mothers” (p. 113) and interactions between fathers and sons are critically important in a boy’s life, but they don’t always look the same as interactions between mother and son. Fathers tend to develop their own loving style of teaching, guiding and playing with their boys. Pollack (1998) also argues that this natural nurturing ability that fathers have is generative, and defined as “one who cares a lot about the next generation, who wants to help guide his children and give them what they need to be productive, creative, and happy” (p. 117). These fathers enjoy being needed by their children and thrive on being able to give them what they need. Some fathers center their generative impulse more traditionally by focusing on working hard toward financial and professional success for their families.
while others focus their efforts on developing close and loving relationships with their daughters and sons.

Parents’ attitudes toward sons and daughters often reflect gender stereotypes, and their actions toward children are often influenced by gender labels (Wood, 2003). Girls are generally treated more gently and encouraged to be more emotionally and physically reserved, and research reports that sons are encouraged to aim for achievement with success tied to what they are able to do, while daughters find more positive responses for interpersonal and social skills (Wood, 2003). Gender expectations are communicated to both boys and girls through their toys and games, assigned household chores, and responses from parents in regard to how acceptable certain behaviors and expressions of emotions are based on their genders. While sons receive more encouragement to conform to masculinity and more reward for doing so than daughters receive for femininity (Wood, 2003), it is more acceptable for daughters to be included in activities and nurtured in ways that are considered “tomboyish”. Traditionally, fathers seem to be more insistent on gender-stereotyped toys and activities especially for sons than are mothers (Wood, 2003).

While this is true, children also learn about gender through modeling, and watching who does what in their families. In families that observe a structure with traditional sex-roles children learn that women nurture, clean, cook, and show emotional sensitivity, while men earn money, make decisions, and are emotionally controlled (Wood, 2003), however, since not all families espouse this model, children learn alternative models and see their parents in different roles regardless of their gender.

Research on parent responsibility for child care, showed that mothers invest more
time than do fathers (Hochschild, 1989) even when both parents held full time jobs outside of the home. This research also identified that fathers and mothers engaged in different types of child care with mothers traditionally taking on more of the day to day activities serving as the nurturer or comforter, and fathers more typically engaged in more enjoyable and occasional activities as the preferred playmate (Hochschild, 1989).

Learning gender roles through observation of parent models prepares children to reproduce roles in their own lives (Woods, 2003). With fathers being particularly important in shaping gender in their children, daughters tend to use both parents while sons rely most exclusively on fathers, and the extent to which fathers hold traditional beliefs influence how conservative children are in their view of gender roles and expectations (Wood, 2003).

In the *Unfinished revolution: How a generation is reshaping family, work and gender in America* (2009) New York University sociologist, Kathleen Gerson, summarizes her study on millennials and concludes that regardless of their own family experiences, today’s young men and women have grown up in revolutionary times. For better or worse, they have inherited new options and questions about women’s and men’s proper places.” (p. 7) Making the transition to adulthood, they have no standard paths to follow. Most women no longer assume they can or will want to stay at home with young children, but there is no clear model for how those children should be raised. Most men no longer assume that it is their sole responsibility to support a family, but there is no clear path to manhood. Work and family shifts have created an ambiguous mix of new options and new insecurities with growing conflicts between work and parenting. Amid
these conflicts and contradictions young women and men must search for new answers and develop innovative responses (Gerson, 2009).

**The Importance of Work**

The importance of work has often been tied closely to the male identity. In our culture, money is often equated with success, and for many men, it also has a strong connection to masculinity (Pleck & Sawyer, 1974). Nicholas Townsend (2002) author of “*The Package Deal*” writes about men’s identity in relation to work by saying that “Men’s prestige, their value to others, and their self-worth are measured by their identity as workers and their earnings from their work. Men who do not have jobs are frequently branded as unworthy, morally inferior and failures as men.” (p. 117). Men often measure themselves and are measured by others by what they are worth in the market place, not by their worth as human beings. Analysis of the contemporary workplace challenges such as social, economic and technological changes have stripped away some of the traditional structures that shape individual identities (Kuhn, 2006; Eranta & Moisander, 2011). These changes are creating increased pressure for individuals to construct images of self that are employable and flexible (Kuhn, 2006). Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory helps focus the discussion of work and family roles through the mutual dependence of “structure and agency”, the interconnectedness of rules and social systems and the resulting expectations for social conduct (Giddens, 1984). Structures are the resource and the product of actions. Parenting through traditional mother and father roles suggests a condition that forces individuals to move through a variety of social contexts, assuming a variety of roles, attitudes, values and life choices (Petroski, 2006), resulting in an identity constructed of multiple selves reveled in a variety of social circumstances.
Relationships as Work- Family Issues

Current converging social and ideological trends are impacting our focus on work showing a shift toward more work-family issues. With increasing numbers of women in the workforce, single-parent and dual earner families, aging populations requiring care (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Jorgenson, 1995), as well as the influence of technology on the traditional ideas about what “work” is and where it happens the emotional interface between parents’ work experiences and the quality of parent-child relationships is spilling over into the family domain (Jorgenson, 1995).

Research has shown that children are introduced to and socialized to the nature of work, organizational life, the responsibilities of work and jobs, as well as the meanings and meaningfulness of work at a very early age (Buzzanell, et al, 2011; Lucas, 2011). Children also through these early interactions learn how people feel about work, and the jobs people hold (Buzzanell, 2011; Jablin 2001), as well as the importance of work and its intersection with family, and family values (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris & Shepherd, 2006).

Developmental career theories suggest that an individual’s career progresses and evolves throughout his/her life. The refinement of an early theory by Super et al. (1996), articulated a life-span, life-space approach to career development, focused on the evolutionary nature of careers. Super et al. (1996) emphasized the idea of career development as a continuous process as people choose, enter and adjust to a variety of occupations and work situations over their lifetime.
Historical and Philosophical Representations

Children learn at an early age, mostly through educational and peer interactions, what it means to act like and be presented as being a boy or a girl, and are quick to demonstrate that they understand these roles. In Western culture, the common, stereotypical view of masculinity takes many forms (David & Brannon, 1976, Fasteau, 1974, Kimmel, 2006). David and Brannon (1976) and Fasteau (1974) talk about four common themes that make up the core requirements of the masculine role. The four themes identified as part of the masculine ideology are: “No Sissy Stuff”, which refers to the stigma of stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including emotional attributes. “The Big Wheel” which refers to the importance of success and status and the idea that masculinity is tied to the need to be looked up to. “The Sturdy Oak” connecting toughness, confidence and self-reliance to masculinity, and “Give 'Em Hell” which relates masculinity to the characteristics of aggression, violence, and daring. Looking at the idea of manhood in a historical context presents it as a constantly changing collection of meanings, constructed through relationships with and between the individual, the world, and others. Manhood is a socially constructed concept that means different things at different times to diverse populations. Culture, class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and geographic location are all influencers of that meaning (Hammond, 2005; Kimmel, 2006; Petroski, 2006).

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) argue that if the behavior being studied is what constitutes masculinity then masculinity cannot be used to explain the behavior. Attributing men’s behavior to masculinity in some ways serves to discount men’s agency or choice. What signifies maleness aside from anatomical differences is based on
behavior and perceived attitudes. Thus, examining the communication concerns and behaviors of a population of stay-at-home fathers regarding questions focused on attitudes and expectations, definitions of mother and fatherhood, parenting practices, work concepts, and understandings about what fathers talk about and role related tensions will provide a foundation for consideration. This foundation will be used to help demonstrate the narrative and discursive representations of what makes these fathers manly, and the shifts in behavior that signify a systematic breakdown of common perceptions.

During the latter part of the 19th century, being a father in the sense of contributing to the creation of children is part of the masculine image, but fathering, the actual care of the children is not. Traditionally, men did spend a significant amount of time taking care of their children, and were very involved in the daily activities of parenting. Roman Krznaric (2012) in an article written for the Guardian used cultural and historical examples to dispel the current misperception that today’s “superdad” is capable of rearing children and maintaining the home is not a new phenomenon. Krznaric offered supporting evidence in the “Man of the house” essay, that it wasn’t more than a few hundred years ago when “most men were stay-at-home fathers, skilled at comforting wailing babes and bathing squirming toddlers.” Historically, some of this conflict and tension surrounding the idea that being a caregiver for children is inappropriate for men comes from the perception that it is a diversion from a man’s “real work” which is the building of a strong career, and supporting his family (Fasteau, 1974). Historically, if a man expressed the desire to want to spend more time with his children, or if he was able to do so, he was in jeopardy of being suspected and labeled by his peers and colleagues as
not being sufficiently ambitious (Fasteau, 1974). The rewards of caring for and being involved in the lives of one’s children are personal and hard to measure. Most men are not taught to value this kind of experience because it doesn’t lead to power, wealth or status, and the male stereotype directs men to seek their sense of self-esteem, through the achievement of measurable, objective, often competitive standards (David & Brannon, 1976; Fasteau, 1974).

**Fatherhood as an Occupation**

There is very little scholarship on the men who serve as primary caregivers for families in the United States. Some of the reasoning behind this lack of information can be related to what Hochschild (1989) refers to as the “stalled revolution” and an emphasis on men’s lack of equal participation in housework and childcare which fosters an absence of attention to households where men are taking primary responsibility and fathering full time. Fatherhood literature also tends to lack specific questions focused on exploring the meaning of fatherhood and behaviors that father’s carryout in the home (Latshaw, 2009). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a stay-at-home father is a married father with children younger than 15 who has remained out of the labor force for at least one year primarily to care for the family while his wife works outside of the home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This narrow definition eliminates many fathers who while not fitting the Census Bureau definition of stay-at-home father, still classify themselves as such. Given the social and cultural expectations that fathers provide monetarily for their families, it is reasonable to believe that many men while taking on the primary caregiver role, may also continue to have some participation in the labor force, because
the stigma associated with being an unemployed male and a caregiver are two roles not traditionally associated with the ideal of masculine or father.

Most people socialized in the United States over the past 30 years have a number of attitudes about gender and what it means. Although they may not subscribe to the ideals of manhood and womanhood held by their parents and grandparents, some of the perceptions and behaviors remain as part of our social foundation. Fasteau (1974) asserts that men devalue the work that women are allowed to do simply by calling it feminine or they devalue the woman doing the work. By the same token, in movies like “Mr. Mom” and “Daddy Daycare” stay-at-home fathers are devalued because the work that they are doing is considered to be woman’s work.

Women and men perform different tasks because these tasks affirm and reproduce a gendered interaction order (Coltrane, 2000; Hochschild, 1989). Doing specific household tasks provide opportunities for both men and women to demonstrate to themselves and others that they are a competent member of a sex category with the capacity and desire to perform appropriately gendered behaviors (Coltrane, 2000).

Kimmel (2006) quotes a psychiatrist writing for a 1947 article in Parents magazine as saying, “For men the celebration of family was not supposed to be an emasculating retreat. Being a father is not ‘sissy’ business; it is an occupation” (p.161). Furthermore, fatherhood is possibly “one of the most important occupations in the world” (p.161). There are clearly, certain domestic activities within the context of family that tend to be perceived as more masculine. Cooking could be taken as an example. Using the family barbeque in many instances is seen as a masculine endeavor says Kimmel
quoting *Esquire* Magazine’s *Handbook for Hosts*, whose author advises “after all, outdoor cooking is a man’s job” (p162).

Psychologists, social scientists and childcare experts during the baby boom, between 1946 and 1964, encouraged fathers to get involved with their children, and other aspects of what was considered domestic work. It was fine for fathers to help out on occasion, but they needed to be careful not to step too far into the domestic domain. Being a father who spent too much time involved with activities that were seen as domestic, or feminine, violated the definition of the “American male” as primary provider for his wife and children. A man’s primary area of performance was considered to be his occupational role, and function as the breadwinner. The implication then, if a man was not the primary breadwinner, was that there was something wrong with him, and that not having a “job” outside of the home suggested a crossing of the thin line that existed between what might be considered a feminization of the over-domesticated dad. A father who was very nurturing, emotionally expressive, and available was regarded as effeminate and not meeting the expectations and standards that represented a “real man” (David & Brannon, 1976; Kimmel, 2006). Some men were able to straddle that line by being involved in other activities, and hobbies, that supported more masculine ideologies and allowed them to maintain their position.

Depending on the circumstances, every aspect of work takes on a particular meaning, not only in regard to the particular work tasks, but also the schedules and relationships between the workers and their employers (Salaman, 1997). Shared meanings help to differentiate what is considered work from non-work and the
significance of work activities and relationships as they vary over time and cultural context (Salaman 1997).

Latshaw’s (2009) study on stay-at-home fathers and work suggests that there is a need to rethink the definition of stay-at-home fatherhood and reconsider who is included in the population of stay-at-home fathers. This study also suggested implications for how the time fathers are at home is conceptualized and measured against the idea of stay-at-home motherhood and the associated stigmatization of the role. Latshaw (2009) argued that stay-at-home fatherhood is viewed by men in this role as a more temporary phenomenon, predicated on their ability to return to full-time work once their children are in school full-time, or a higher paying position becomes available compared to stay-at-home mothers who often are expected to stay at home until the children are independent and leave the house. Latshaw (2009) also asserted that fathers who have primary care of children and maintain some type of employment, part-time inside or outside of the home should also be considered as belonging to the group of men identifying as stay-at-home fathers which adds to the depth of data available in examining family forms as they shift and adapt in response to social, cultural and economic changes.

**Conceptualizing Stigma**

The idea of stigma, according to Goffman (1963) is an attribute that discredits an individual, reducing him or her “from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one” (p. 3). Goffman also identifies stigma as not an attribute alone, but as a “relationship between attribute and stereotype” (p.4), meaning that an individual possesses particular traits or qualities that are defined by others based on stereotypes as an undesirable or negative characteristic. These particular attributes and the perceptions
of them then result in biased behaviors directed toward the stigmatized person or group 
(Goffman, 1963; Hannem & Bruckert, 2012).

The “visibility, “perceptibility,” or “evidentness” of a particular characteristic, or how well or badly the stigma is adapted to communicate that the individual has it is directly related to the individual or groups social and personal identity as well as their management of the stigmatized characteristic or attribute (Goffman, 1963). Major and O’Brien (2005) proposed citing Crocker et al. (1998) that stigmatization occurs when a person possesses or is believed to possess some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context. The assumption then is that people who are stigmatized have or are believed to have characteristics that mark them as different and are devalued in the eyes of others.

In an instance where the stigma is invisible and know only to the individual or is something that is relatively unapparent to others, the individual learns to trust in some level of secrecy, and learns to cope with the way others treat the kind of person he/she is trying to be (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963) argues that, due to this developed social identity, the individual with a secret differentness may find him/herself in three possible kinds of spaces of experience. There are “out of bound places where for the individual exposure means expulsion” (p.81). There are “civil places where persons of the individuals kind” when known are “carefully and painfully treated as if they were not disqualified for routine acceptance when in fact, they sometimes are” (p. 81) and finally, there are the “back places, where stigmatized individuals are exposed and need not try to conceal their stigma or be overly concerned with trying to make it become invisible” (p.81). This is evident in some cases when individuals choose the company of others
with the same or similar stigmas. Goffman also identified that these back places might be created involuntarily when individuals are collected together against their will based on a common stigma. In this way individuals are more at ease among their social group and may discover acquaintances not considered in the group really are, however, the individual may also run the risk or being easily discredited should a known person of the non-stigmatized group enter the scene (Goffman, 1963).

Stigma is regarded by most scholars of stigma as a social construction, a label attached by society, and point to variability across time and cultures in what attributes, behaviors or groups are stigmatized (Major & Obrien, 2005).

The Stigma of Stay-at-Home Fatherhood

If fathers are stigmatized because they stay-at-home, are perceived to take on behaviors that are representative of the “Mr. Mom” stereotype and react based on their response to the stigma, how do their children use the relationships and models learned in their micro systems to inform their learning, and how will their ideas about work and it’s meaning in regard to fathers at home be influenced? Modern-day perspectives on stigma emphasize the extent to which the effects of stigma are enabled through the targeted groups understanding of how others view them, their interpretations of social contexts and their motives and goals. The assumption is that stigma puts a person or group at risk of experiencing threats to his/her social identity. Crocker and Major (1989) hypothesized that stigmatization threatens self-esteem and can lead to uncertainty as to whether outcomes are due to one’s personal identity, or social identity.

The line between family identity and occupational identity is complicated for many of the fathers who are in a stay-at-home father role (Latshaw, 2009). Under the
patriarchal model of the family, wives were responsible for all of the housework and other unpaid family work as well as everything needed to keep the family functioning smoothly (Eichler, 1997). Social and cultural expectations linked to masculinity and fatherhood and the ability to provide for one’s family, create situations where fathers at home must decide how they want to be viewed, and how comfortable they are with whatever role or perception they choose. For women to stay at home until their children are old enough to be independent is not generally considered unusual or stigmatized, however, the same is not true for male caregivers. Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) identified that some fathers frame work and family as ‘dual concerns’ with employment being central to their roles as men and fathers. Family for them is organized around work and considered to be a multifaceted negotiation process assisted by their individual definitions of work. Other fathers however, view their fatherhood role as problem solver in the midst of networks of responsibilities. These fathers construct work and family by organizing family around work and by framing ‘family first’ discourses based on their particular circumstances (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009).

In the socialization of children through family, how gender roles are internalized “the prescriptions and proscriptions,” (do’s and don’ts) (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2009, p. 270) for being appropriately masculine and feminine are learned from others around them and the origins of the perceptions and stereotypes that influence intergroup communication live within families and are modeled and reinforced through social information gathered from family, media representations, and interactions with environmental factors (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2009; Wood, 2003). How fathers at home frame their experience and manage the associated stigma is an important determinant of
how their families and children will develop attitudes and behaviors around gender and identity.

**Lifespan Approach to Communication and Work**

Eriksson and Freud, in their theories of personality development as well as others attempt to trace the steps through which children experience reality, begin to form their identity, and come to understand the rules by which the game of life is played (Borow, 1984). Likewise, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model of human development uses an ecological systems theory to explain how everything in a child's relationships and the child's environment affects how that child grows and develops. This model can be applied to this discussion from the perspective that an individual's development is based on a complex system of relationships and is affected by his/her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Children's micro-systems include any immediate relationships or organizations they interact with, such as their immediate family or caregivers and their schools and/or daycare facilities. At the core of the bioecological model of human development is the concept of “proximal process” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 177), thought to occur primarily in the brain, but found to also be influenced by cognition, emotion and motivation and content identified as people, objects, and symbols representing the “outside world” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Applying these theories to the study of stay-at-home fathers suggests that as individuals move through developmental stages and consider options for their future, they form opinions and make decisions in part based on their past experiences, with family, as well as social encounters and interactions. These encounters and interactions influence the development of the individual’s sense of reality, as well as self-concept and discourse.
structures regarding their world views that include stereotypes and biases in their perceptions and attitudes about gender and work roles within families.
INTRODUCTION

Given the ambiguity surrounding the societal status of the stay-at-home father as well as its potential for stigmatization, as demonstrated in the literature review, in this study I employed a qualitative, grounded theory methodology to collect data that offers greater depth in understanding the communicative discourse of stay-at-home fathers. My hope is to gain a more nuanced understanding of the extent to which this population of fathers identifies with the SAHF role, how they talk about what they are doing in their SAHF role, and the narratives they create for themselves and their families in relation to their roles as men, fathers, and workers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Consistent with common uses of the grounded theory approach several broad categories of questions were developed influenced by research in psychology on stay-at-home fathers focused on: (a) understanding how these men discuss decisions related to becoming stay-at-home fathers, (b) how they describe others’ views of their decisions (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008), as well as (c) extending communication research conducted by Petroski and Edley (2006) on how society responds to non-traditional gendered family roles, work and caregiving responsibilities. The three research questions guided this study:
RQ1: How do fathers who have primary responsibility for childcare and home management understand and talk about their role?

RQ2: How does the dominant discourse surrounding stay at home fatherhood shape self-concepts of fathers as men and as workers?

RQ3: What narratives do stay-at-home fathers create to help them negotiate and balance issues of gender, identity, work and family?

PARTICIPANTS

Participant Recruitment

The Old Dominion University, College of Arts and Letters’ Human Subjects Committee approved the study (as exempt from full IRB review) before participant recruitment began (March 7, 2014; A& L HSR13-037). Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. This method of sampling is noted as being well suited for the study of social networks, subcultures, or people who have attributes in common (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). And has been use in other studies also focused on fathers, and families (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009; Golden, 2000; Harrington, 2012). Potential participants were identified through the use of fathering websites (See Appendix D for sample letter); these websites, included specialized stay at home father websites targeted to stay at home fathers and mothers, and general father websites. Flyers (See Appendix E for sample flyer) were posted in local establishments including, recreation centers, libraries, barbershops, and eateries. Additionally information was posted on Old Dominion University announcements, Facebook, Twitter and sent via email to friends and family members of the researcher. A QR Code was created that directed interested individuals
to a data collection point created using Survey Monkey where they could reconfirm the participant criteria and leave contact information. The Survey Monkey database had no connection to the participants’ answers on the questionnaire or interview. A broad and varied approach was used to solicit participants so that the resulting population of fathers would ensure a diversity of geographic location, ethnic and cultural background, supporting the counter argument that methods of snowball sampling introduce biases in the data due to the fact that participants might fall in related social networks (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

**Participant Information**

The participants in this study were adult males over the age of eighteen, representing a self-selected cross section of fathers who are currently or have been the primary caretaker for at least one child, and not employed in more than part time work (i.e., less than 40 hours) outside of the home. As this study sought to describe at some length father’s experiences, in depth data were collected from a total of 14 fathers ranging in age from age-30 to age-57 with a mean age of 43.4. The oldest father in the group was a stay at home father during the 1980’s (during that time he was in his mid-thirties). The ethnicities of the participants include fathers who classify themselves as: Caucasian (71.43%), Hispanic/Latino (14.29%), African American (7.14%), and Anglo/Hispanic/Jew (7.14%). The average household incomes ranged from $30,000 – $40,000 to over $100,000 per year with the median average household income being $50,000 - $60,000 per year (See Table 1 Demographic Characteristics). In total these men provided primary care for 31 children ranging in age between less than 6 months to 18 years. Of the 31 children, there were a total of 19 boy and 12 girls, and 50% of the
fathers cared for 2 children. Fathers reported being at-home full time between 6 months to 18 years, with the mean number of years spent in this role slightly less than 5 years (4.75 years). The majority of the fathers, 50% of the sample, had completed a bachelor's degree or higher prior to their becoming stay-at-home fathers. The fathers also come from a variety of employment backgrounds prior to their at-home experience that include positions in law, graphic design and creative arts, business, education, sales, healthcare, and the military.

All of the fathers were married during the majority of their stay-at-home experience. Two of the fathers divorced during the time they were in the stay-at-home father role and two fathers are stepfathers, one of which is in a same-sex spousal relationship. Fathers also provided background information on their spouses. Ten of the spouses held bachelor's degrees or graduate or professional degrees and were in a variety of professions and positions of responsibility in fields including, healthcare, business, and military. Thus, although small, this sample includes age and income diversity, but is very homogenous in ethnic culture and levels of education.
Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Stay-at-Home Father Participants*

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<td>&gt; $100,000</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td><strong>Highest Level of Education (Father)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High School Diploma/GED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associates Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree (MA/MS/JD)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Level of Education (Spouse)</strong> b</td>
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<td>Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Length of Time as SAHF</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
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<td>9-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
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<td><strong>Stay-at-Home Father Residence c</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Colorado</td>
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<td>New York</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Father’s fields of work d</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney</td>
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<td>College Teacher</td>
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<td>Graphic Designer</td>
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<td>Record Store Owner</td>
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<td>Freelance Marketing/Audio Production</td>
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<td>Case Manager</td>
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<td>Music /Catering/ Bartending</td>
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<tr>
<td>Various jobs</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>UPS</td>
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<td>Paramedic/ Sales/</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Military</td>
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</table>

*Note.*  
*N=14*

*a* One father was in stay-at-home role twice with different average incomes and one father did not provide an average annual income

*b* One father did not provide spouses level of education (NA Divorced)

*c* Families may have lived in more than one location during the period the father was at home due to spouse’s job or relocation

*d* Military - 5 of the fathers reported a military connection for themselves, spouse or both
DATA COLLECTIONS PROCEDURES

Potential participants who met the requisite criteria as outlined in the posted flyers and emailed information, and contacted me directly or were referred to me were contacted via email with an invitation from me to participate in the study. The information included a brief outline and overview of what the study was about and what they would be asked to do. Once the fathers responded that they would be willing to participate, they were contacted again by email or phone to schedule an in-person or phone interview. Six in-person and eight phone interviews were conducted between June 2, 2014 and July 7, 2014.

The use of qualitative techniques are useful when examining social phenomena that has not been studied in great detail and when there is a desire to move beyond what is commonly known or thought to be in order to see the world from the perspective of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Doing so allows for the discovery of empirical knowledge that adds to our foundation. This applies in the study of stay-at-home fathers. A semi-structured respondent interview format was used as a means to gather information from the identified fathers and provided opportunities for them to share their perspective through stories, accounts and explanations as well as provide information to address the three research questions. Participants were asked a total of 18 questions: 9 demographic questions, 6 questions focused on role definition, 3 questions focused on self-concept, 5 questions focused on work and parenting, and 3 questions focused on negotiating balance in the role. These kinds of interviews are well-suited to helping the interviewer gain a better understanding of the participants' knowledge, experiences and views (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The in-person and phone interviews were semi-structured around a list of
concerns related to five main areas generated by the research questions and review:
general demographic information, role definition (e.g. “What does the term stay-at-home
father mean to you?”), self-concept (e.g. “How are relationships affected by your role as
a stay at home father?”), parenting and work (e.g. “Describe a typical day for you?”), and
negotiating balance (e.g. “How long do you plan to stay in this role?”). Each father was
also given the opportunity to provide concluding remarks (e.g. “Is there any additional
information about your role or your experience as a stay-at-home father that you think
would be important to share?”).

Each interview was audio recorded using two devices, a digital Philips Dictation
Memo recorder and Voice Recorder HD, a digital recording application on my iPad.
Two separate devices were used during each interview in the event one of the methods
failed to record and a backup was needed. Notes were also taken during each interview
for clarification of particular statements, or notable gestures. Each recorded interview
audio file from the digital recorder with no identifying information was uploaded to a
secure password protected file and transcribed using Phillips SpeechExec ProTranscribe
transcription software and a foot pedal. The audio files from the iPad were not uploaded
to the computer, but stored in a password protected folder on the device. The audio files
and digital recordings were destroyed after ensuring the transcriptions were complete and
accurate.

As a means to gather additional descriptive data about the perceptions of
masculinity of these fathers, at the time the interviews were scheduled, all participants
were also asked to complete the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974), to measure their gender
role perceptions, and return it prior to or on at the time of the interview (See Appendix
C). The inventory was sent by email to each father upon his agreement to participate and asked to complete and return the inventory prior to or at the time of the interview. For those fathers who did not return the inventory, a follow up email with the inventory attached was sent following the phone interview in an attempt to collect surveys from all participants. Eleven of the fourteen fathers returned a completed Sex Role Inventory. One father returned an inventory partially completed. His information was not included in the total number of completed inventories.

**Interview Procedures**

Interviews were conducted either by phone or in person. In person interviews were conducted at on-campus locations that afforded a public venue with some sense of privacy. I used interview rooms in the Old Dominion University Career Management Center on campus, and I met one father at the local campus coffee shop. Phone interviews were conducted from my office. During each interview, I started the conversation by introducing myself to establish rapport and checking with each father that this was still a good time for me to conduct the interview. I reiterated that I would only ask for thirty to sixty minutes of their time and provided each interviewee with a verbal description of the project and goals, as well as a synopsis of the eventual benefit of their participation. I provided each participant with a copy of the consent form either electronically prior to the interview or hard copy at the time of the interview and reviewed it verbally with them allowing time to respond to any questions or concerns. Each interviewee was reminded that if at any point he became uncomfortable or did not want to respond to a particular question he would only have to indicate as such and we would move on. Each respondent was also given or electronically sent a $5 Starbucks
gift card as a token of appreciation for his time and sharing of information following the interview.

The interview was structured so that after initial introductions and overview of the process, each father was asked a series of eight questions to gather general background and demographic information. The questions focused on gathering information about the participant’s age, ethnicity, work outside the home, education, household income, and number of children and their ages. Participants were then led through a series of open-ended questions focused on role definition, self-concept, ideas of parenting and work, and negotiating balance. Each section had three to six questions, depending on the father’s responses, some of the questions were not asked because the material was covered in previous responses. Because of the semi-structured format, in some cases additional questions were asked for clarification or to illicit more information from the father about his response. (See Appendix B for interview questions)

**Materials**

**Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI).** The Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) is a widely used instrument designed to measure gender role perceptions. The BSRI is based on a theory about both the cognitive processing and the motivational dynamics of sex-typed and androgynous individuals. Participants rate themselves on the inventory’s Masculinity and Femininity Scale, each of which contain 20 personality characteristics selected on the basis of sex typed social desirability. The individual is asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale how well each of these masculine and feminine personality characteristics describes himself. The scale ranges from 1 ("Never or almost never true") to 7 ("Always or almost always true"). These are characteristics qualified as masculine as
determined by two independent samples of undergraduates to be more desirable in American society for a man than for a woman (e.g., ambitious, dominant, self-reliant), and it qualified as feminine if it was judged to be more desirable in American society for a woman than for a man (e.g., affectionate, gentle, understanding) (Bem, 1974, p. 158). An individual is sex typed masculine, feminine or androgynous using this scale based on the difference between his or her support of masculine and feminine personality characteristics (Bem, 1974). On the basis of his/her responses, each person receives an "Androgyny Score" defined as the t-ratio for the difference between his or her endorsement of masculine and feminine personality characteristics. The Androgyny Score is the difference between a person's endorsement of masculinity and femininity standardized with respect to the standard deviations of his or her masculinity and femininity scores. The Bem Sex Role Inventory provides independent assessments of masculinity and femininity in terms of the respondent's self-reported possession of socially desirable, stereotypically masculine and feminine personality characteristics. This can also be seen as a measurement of the extent to which respondents spontaneously sort self-relevant information into distinct masculine and feminine categories. The self-administering 60-item questionnaire measures masculinity, femininity, androgyny, and undifferentiated, using the Masculinity and Femininity scales (Bem, 1974). The separate masculinity and femininity scores produced by these scales can be used in several ways. Most commonly, the scores are combined to form four categories: (1) androgynous – high on both masculinity and femininity scales; (2) masculine – high on masculinity scale and low on the femininity; (3) feminine – low on masculinity scale and high on the femininity scale; and (4) undifferentiated (Pleck, 1981).
In subsequent studies, the two dimensions are analyzed separately (Pleck, 1981). The greater the absolute value of the androgyny score, the more the person is sex typed or sex typed reversed. High positive scores indicate femininity and high negative scores indicate masculinity (Bem, 1974). As this study was exploratory, this inventory was used in this study as a way to further explore the identity characteristics of the stay at home fathers in this study. Eleven of the fourteen fathers interviewed (78.5%) completed and returned a BSRI.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The basic idea of the grounded theory approach is to read and reread a textual database of information in order to discover and label common variables as categories, concepts or properties and their interrelationships. Following grounded theory methodology, and analytic induction, general statements from observations during the data gathering process are used to build general statements by looking for patterns in the data.

Three features of grounded theory are important in the analysis of qualitative data. First is that emergent theory is "grounded in" the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded; that categories are developed through an ongoing process of comparing units of data with each other; and that codes, categories and category definitions continue to change with new data changing the scope and terms of the analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). This research is an attempt to discover rather than test variables in order to determine how meanings are formed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The data analysis process consisted of several phases based on the grounded theory
model (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These steps include coding for as many categories as possible from the data, integration and dimensionalization (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Labeling

The first step of the analysis process is conceptualizing data. This involves breaking down, or taking apart sentences, observations or paragraphs and giving each discrete idea, incident, or name that represents the phenomenon. This is accomplished by asking questions about each item like: What is this? What does this represent? What is going on here? Following the questioning, incidents and responses are compared one to another across each question for every individual respondent so that similar items can be given the same name.

Discovering and Naming Categories

Once particular phenomenon are identified in the data, common concepts are grouped together to reduce the number of areas required to work with. The process of grouping related concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena is called categorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

This process of coding and developing categories or themes is a result of first hand contact with the data through the conduct of the interviews, the process of transcription, and the reading and rereading of the completed transcripts. Through this process categories were built, named and attributed common characteristics. The goal of this portion of the process is to open up the inquiry by making comparisons or asking “who”, “what”, “how” and “why” questions about what the fathers’ responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each father’s response to each question was compared across questions
and notations were made to highlight similarities. Over time as comparisons were made, the categories were defined and redefined until there were clear differentiations between categories. Through this stage, my thesis advisor served as a second coder/reader to help ensure a reliability of categories. These categories were operationalized as relevant ideas, actions or events mentioned in response to each of the research questions. At this point a codebook was created that could be used as a tool for documenting or cataloguing the category definitions and the codes used for identifying each category, as well as examples of text from notes and interview transcripts for each grouping.

Integration and Dimensionalization

The second step of the process is called integration (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Through this process the categories are reshaped to produce a deeper meaning and starts with a process called axial coding, or creating a new set of codes whose purpose is to make connections between categories.

The final stage is dimensionalization, identifying properties of categories and constructs along continua or dimensions.

Transcription

The manifest content of each completed interview was transcribed by the interviewer and a secondary transcriber and checked for accuracy by the interviewer. I was assisted by my thesis advisor in the review of interviewee responses to the open-ended interview questions to identify possible coding categories or themes. These categories were operationalized as significant concepts, behaviors and attitudes mentioned in response to each of the questions posed to the interviewees. I had primary responsibility for coding the data; however during this process I met regularly with my
thesis advisor to discuss themes and cross check for accuracy in coding. In instances of new information or themes, adjustments were made to names and definitions of codes. When using a grounded theory style of analysis interviews and field notes should be entirely transcribed and analyzed before moving on to the next. By coding and evaluating in this manner guidance is provided for the next interviews and helps identify what other data may need to be collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This method also allows for identification of gaps in the formation of the theory, and data while providing for a fuller and more varied analysis of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The BSRI was also scored and coded for each father who returned a survey. The BSRI was scored and evaluated using the following method:

- Ratings for questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, 46, 49, 52, 55, and 58 were added together and the total was divided by 20. This number represents the masculinity score.

- Ratings for questions 3, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38, 41, 44, 47, 50, 53, 56, and 59 were added together and the total divided total by 20 representing the femininity score.

- The classification of Undifferentiated is assigned to those whose scores are below the median (<4.9) on both the masculine and feminine scales (Sedney, 1981). If the masculinity score is above 4.9 which is the approximate median for the masculinity scale, and the femininity score is above 4.9, which is the approximate femininity median then the individual would be classified as androgynous on Bem’s scale (Bem, 1974).
INITIAL CODING CATEGORIES AND THEMES

The following sections provide important information obtained from the fathers in this study. Data analysis is based on 234 pages of double-spaced interview transcripts resulting from 11 hours and 18 minutes of in-person and telephone interviews. I reviewed the fathers’ demographic backgrounds and factors that led them to become at-home dads. Through the interview process, and multiple listenings and readings of the data between August and November 2014, I gained information to describe the participants’ narratives related to what it is like to be a stay at home father. I was also able to also explore their social experiences, how they perceive themselves and their perceptions of how others see them in their role as stay-at-home father.

The semi-structured interviews provided a wealth of information to the researcher in regard to the stay-at-home father experience. During each interview the researcher asked an initial question and allowed the respondent father to elaborate in response. If additional information or clarification was needed additional questions were asked. Initial questions with a specific range of answers were asked at the start of each interview to collect demographic information from each participant. Subsequent questions focused on the exploration of how the fathers defined their role, their concept of self in relation to that role, how they functioned within the family in regard to parenting and work and how they were able to establish and/or assign balance and meaning to their role as stay at home father.
Getting to Know the Stay-at-Home Fathers

Fathers in this study come from varied backgrounds and have had a variety of experiences working inside and outside of the home. Eight of the fourteen fathers (57%) held some type of part-time employment while managing day to day care of home and children. These experiences included coaching (athletic/health), work as independent distributors of products, teaching, and professional positions that allowed a flexible schedule and included work from home. Three of the fathers were students during their time at home, and planned to continue in the SAHF role until full time work became available. Several of the fathers who have been in the stay-at-home father role for an extended period of time, or who came into the role as a result of a change in work status outside the home found work from home, or part-time employment options that would allow them to contribute to family finances once the children were in school. Four of the fathers were not working at all and devoted 100% of their time to the care of home and children. Fifty percent (50%) of the fathers have been stay-at-home fathers in only Virginia, twenty-one percent (21%) have been stay-at-home fathers in two or more states, and fourteen percent (14%) of the sample have been in the stay-at-home father role in countries outside of the United States. Forty-three percent (43%) of the fathers in the sample have some affiliation with the military through their previous work or their spouse. Three of the fathers (27%) rated high masculinity scoring on the Bem Sex Role Inventory, with a score greater than 4.9 which is the approximate median on the masculinity scale, and one (9%) of the fathers rated high femininity scoring with femininity score greater than 4.9, and six (55%) of the fathers scored below the median on both the masculine and feminine scale equating to a classification of undifferentiated.
One of the fathers (9%) ranked above the comparison group on both the masculine and feminine scale indicating an androgynous rating on the BEM scale. The overall average scoring on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) for this population of fathers completing the survey was 4.8 on the masculine scale, and 4.4 on the feminine score. A summary of the BSRI scores for this sample of SAHF’s is included in Graph 1 below.

**Graph 1. Bem Sex Role Inventory Summary of Scores for SAHF Sample**

Having a broad understanding of who these fathers are is important in understanding the specific details of their stay-at-home father story. In the retelling of the fathers’ stories below, names and identifying information have been changed or removed in order to protect the identities of the fathers participating in the study.
Deciding to Stay Home

Most often, among the men in this sample, the decision to be an at-home father reflected two major considerations: the couples’ financial circumstances and their values regarding how their children should be raised and by whom. In nearly all of the fathers’ situations explored, their spouses’ earnings or potential earnings were greater than the fathers’. In some instances the fathers’ incomes were not sufficient to offset the cost of daycare, or the father’s full time position afforded more flexibility allowing him to take on the stay-at-home father role.

A number of the fathers commented on the feasibility and practicality of the decision for them to be the at home parent. One of the fathers identified as Hiram (age-48, 1 child) said specifically, “Necessity, we just figured right now, who’s making more.” Another father, Mario, (age-48, 2 children) shared:

My wife made a lot more money than I did and that is the bottom line. When kids came on the scene, and we did the math of child care... It was easier for me to do it and more cost effective, and we just thought that it was better if I stayed home.

The other factor that was clear in many of the interviews was that the decision to become a stay-at-home father often reflected strong desires on the parts of both spouses to have one parent at home with the children rather than putting the children in the care of public or private childcare providers. Fathers shared comments like:

We always agreed that whoever could take care of the children would take care of the children. (Frank, age-57, 2 children)
It was easier for me to do it and more cost effective. We thought it was better if I stayed home and a lot of it had to do with dealing with daycare and caregivers. We just were more comfortable. (Mario, age-48, 2 children)

We decided that we would rather have one of us raise our kids rather than sending them off to childcare. (Ben, age-48, 2 children)

Another of the fathers shared that even though his working spouse desired to be at home the financial implications and their feelings about daycare both impacted their decision for him to be the at home father. He mentioned how his wife wished she could be at home saying:

I mean she wishes she could do it, but financially, it doesn’t make sense. She told me that she’s really happy that one of us could stay at home, ‘cause the benefits I think are so much greater than if he was just in a daycare every day.” (Kevin, age-31, 1 child)

For many of the fathers, entries into the role were not easy transitions. For a number of the stay-at-home fathers, the experience was a kin to culture shock, going from an active work environment with peers and colleagues to a much more isolated environment taking care of a single infant, or in some cases more than one child. Some of the examples of their experiences included comments like:

It took me probably, once the decision was made, probably about two months to really understand the scope of what that meant. (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

There’s a certain level of social that goes on at the office. They have romances, and gossip, and they have interpersonal conflicts and they are able to do problem solving
and group problem solving and have collaboration. None of those exist for the stay-at-home parent, so to some degree you go ‘bat shit’. (Adam, age-38, 4 children)

When you think of being the stay at home parent, you think you are going to have time to do this and that. Buy a golf membership and whatever else, and it turned out to be the exact opposite. It was definitely more work than if I had a traditional job. (Leon, age-43, 2 children)

Other fathers seemed to feel that being at home was a natural transition and commented:

I felt very prepared. I had always been good with children. (Frank, 57, 2 children)

I am very comfortable doing it. I have a history of doing it...taking care of care of younger siblings. (Kevin, age-31, 1 child)

I was in the Navy for four years and had a lot of hands on experiences. I also learned a lot from my mom. (Ben, age-48, 2 children)

I felt very prepared. I come from a big family...there’s always babies around. My whole life what I wanted was to have a family, and I’ve got it so it’s natural for me to walk around with a kid on my head and pushing a stroller. (Ethan, age-34, 3 children)

Managing work and family is often depicted as a juggling act requiring the balancing of choices, resources, and priorities. This juggling act between work and family while common among both men and women is understood and talked about in varying ways and the intersections, outcomes and interplay of these life domains have implications for individuals, families and organizations (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2007). These implications related to lifestyle choices, community status, and work and career influence how individuals construct and carry out their identities. In clarifying how individuals understand their own and others’ identities in different settings, the rules that
anchor and enable them to interact with others are shaped and changed by various
discourses (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2007). How these fathers frame meaning and
establish identity in relation to their role as a stay-at-home father is one of the questions
this study seeks to answer.

Identity and Role Definition

In order to better understand how at-home fathers define their identity, the men in
this study were asked what the term “stay-at-home father” meant to them and how they
derscribe their role when they are asked the question “What do you do?” In 8 out of 14
interviews the at-home dads defined themselves as “stay at home fathers” while the
remaining fathers directly identified with either past or current occupations including
“student,” for those fathers who were finishing, “continuing or planning to continue
educational pursuits.” One father noted that even after finishing his degree while job
searching it was easier for him to still connect to his status as “student” then his current
role as “stay-at-home father.” His response when asked how he handled introductions
and the question, “What do you do?” was to say, “I would say I’m going to school. I still
say I’m getting my master’s degree right now, even after I graduated. I just say I’m
almost done or I’m a musician but I wouldn’t necessarily get to that point where I say,
I’m looking for a job now and I’m staying at home.” (Hiram, age-48, 1 child)

Discomfort with the role impacted fathers’ responses to the question and some fathers
easily admitted that it was uncomfortable for them to acknowledge their role at home.
“Actually, it was a little bit uncomfortable; usually I just told people that I was working
on finishing my degree.” (Ian, age-38, 1 child)
Many of the fathers, particularly those who had been in the at-home dad role for two years or longer, and were comfortable with the role, simply said “I’m a stay-at-home dad.” One father who has been a stay-at-home father for 17 years said, “I told the truth, I said, I’m a stay at home dad. Honestly, it is the most important thing I have done in my life” (Mario, age-48, 2 children). There were also fathers who took a very different approach to answering the question and although they are in the role as stay-at-home father they recognize the stigma associated with their position and masked their perceptions of self by responding with answers that deflected the question or directly connected them with the group of fathers publicly identified as “stay-at-home fathers.”

*I say everything! I mean I do work...I work and stay at home with the kids.*

(Ethan, age-34, 3 children)

*I took a humorous approach to it, I said, I’m a housewife.* (Nick, age- 51, 2 children)

**Self-Concept**

Identities are part of individuals’ cognitive and social structure and are shaped, changed and revealed by discourses (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2007). When actions that reinforce identities or create changes in structures to which people have become attached occurs conflict results and the affected individuals must choose which identity is most valued (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2007). Considering the diversity in expectations and perceptions surrounding the idea of fatherhood, and fathers’ expected role within the family the ways in which men construct their identities and self-concepts around their notions of masculinity and fatherhood are frequently being challenged by popular culture
and society. For fathers who have elected by choice or circumstance to take on a more nontraditional role not typically conceptualized as a representation of the gendered role of father, breadwinner, provider, the question to be considered is how the dominant discourse surrounding stay-at-home fatherhood shapes their concepts of them as fathers, as men and as workers.

Whether they admitted it directly or not, the stigma associated with being a stay-at-home father, and taking on a role that is seen as being primarily feminine did affect how these fathers saw themselves, and influenced how they function. Many of the fathers spoke specifically about how they have come to appreciate the work that stay-at-home mothers do, or that their wives do. When asked about their thoughts on the popular culture’s representation of the stay-at-home father, particularly related to some of the television shows and movies featuring stay-at-home dads, the majority of the fathers identified with the negative reflections and stereotypes and shared examples of how they have been affected. Mr. Mom (1983) was one of the primary movies that came to mind for 10 of the 14 fathers. Several fathers spoke about the representations as being comedy, and not reality. Not being reality seemed to keep them separate from the identity representations of stay-at-home fathers presented in popular culture with statements like:

*I mean everybody has moments where they’re just a little [pause] off and don’t know what they are doing, but you know for the most part I think it was just a comedy, and wasn’t really reality at all.* (Leon, age-43, 2 children)

*I didn’t think about those as being negative toward stay-at home parents. It was always like ...a happy ending turns out what was best for everyone.* (Frank, age-57, 2 children)
It doesn’t bother me...I know they are doing it just for laughs. (Kevin, age-31, 1 child)

I don’t have feelings for that kind of thing. It’s not real life...It doesn’t affect me. (Ethan, age-34, 3 children)

The majority of the fathers interviewed were put-off by these kinds of shows and talked about how these shows and their representations of fathers come back to them in their roles as well as the stigma associated with being a stay-at-home father. Fathers shared comments like:

It’s kind of like what they are doing in commercials now with dads, he’s stupid because he’s a dad and he doesn’t know how to do any of this stuff at all. (Greg, age-39, 2 children)

People ask me all the time are you babysitting today? (Kevin, age-31, 1 child)

People laugh and actually a lot of people when I tell them I’m a stay-at-home dad they’ll give me the ‘Mr. Mom.” (Leon, age-43, 2 children)

You know, there always seems to be some under theme that maybe you are less than a real man if you stay at home doing the wife’s work. I know it’s a traditional way of thinking about it, but I don’t think it is very positive. They always make the guys and husbands dopey. (Hiram, age-48, 1 child)

People say its ok and they’ll be polite, and say that’s good, but I think for the most part people still think it’s a women’s role and the men who do that are somehow less, somehow not man enough ...not going to be a ‘real man’. (Mario, age-48, 2 children)
I think those movies portray it as kind of jokingly chaotic... The dad’s incompetent and just messing around and by the grace of everything that the kids didn’t get hurt. (Ian, age-38, 1 child)

Carl referred to the “X-box lot”, one kind of stay-at-home father he has encountered that supports the popular representation of stay-at-home fathers by saying: Guys take it as being a lazy thing. They think about it [being a stay-at-home father] in the exact same way everybody else does. (Carl, age-34, 3 children)

He also talked about how his grandmother particularly in trying to relate to him compared him to the father in the movie Mr. Mom. He said:

My grandmother still says it [Mr. Mom]. She was mentioning the show, but in a way kind of trying to relate to me. She said, now they have a show so you're not the only one. She didn't even realize that those shows portray us in a pretty terrible way. In the beginning it was kind of like we were this rare kind of anomaly that it's just unnatural. It's kind of how I always thought people would look at it. [They would compare me and what I was doing] to what Michael Keaton was doing in the movie and then kind of ask me “Well how do you plan on taking care of these kids? It's questions that you would never ask a mother.” (Carl, age-34, 3 children)

David saw the representations as how it’s always been, but recognizes opportunities for a change in an age-old dialogue. He said,

They always represent the dad as some clumsy, you know buffoon. Yeah that is pretty much how fathers are always represented. As the ones who don’t really know anything about being responsible adults or responsible for children...it’s
just television! It’s just a dialogue that probably needs to be changed. I mean but that is just how television has always been. It’s a trade that’s a throwback to the beginning of that [idea] that fathers aren’t care takers, that fathers are strictly bread winners and that’s been the same story since the beginning of television. (David, age-40, 4 children)

Relationships

Relationships within the home, the extended family, and with peers are very important and influence how the fathers experience their role at home. Fathers in this study were asked to share how they felt being a stay-at-home father might have affected their relationships with their spouse, children, family and peers. With spouses fathers felt for the most part that there was an acceptance and appreciation that one of them could be at home, and valued that their spouses were willing to take on the role. Fathers also noted the benefit to their relationships exemplified by shared statements such as:

My wife and I do a really good job of separating [the roles]... I don’t try to be a mom, I am still a dad and she still takes on a lot of the motherly things within the family, so it really hasn’t changed our relationship, and it helped everything with freeing up her time [to] be able to work without worrying about the kids. (Leon, age-43, 2 children)

I think my wife appreciated what I did, you know what I’ve done and been doing, but she’s happy that I’m back at work now. (Mario, age-48, 2 children)

I think it has strengthened our marriage because when I am home and [my wife] is off, while I am here home with her and there’s no kids in the house we are able to talk and communicate and discuss things and run errands and do things
together which helped strengthen our relationship. It has been a big plus for us.

(Jake, age-52, 2 children)

Some men talked about some of the challenges and conflict experienced in their relationships. A number of fathers mentioned feeling a loss of respect, and resentment from spouses. They also shared their new found appreciation for and understanding of the experiences of stay-at-home mothers and how that realization impacted their experience as a stay-at-home father:

*I am very lucky because I also work outside the home and at home and I can see if [my spouse] were working outside the home and if I were home all the time we wouldn’t be able to relate to each other because I wouldn’t have any kind of social interaction. The whole idea of where mommies get to have mommy time and the kids play at the McDonalds playground or whatever, I totally get that now. That seemed so totally foreign to me, but now I totally get it. You have to have that because you don’t have anyone else to relate to. You try to relate to your spouse but you can’t relate to them on that level because they don’t even know what your life is like at home so then that causes more conflict and frustration and breakdown in communication. (Adam, age-38, 4 children)*

*With my ex, she went the same route as I hear a lot of men who will come home and talk to their wives basically. She’d say, ‘all you do is sit around and eat bonbons and watch soap operas’, minimize what they[the person at home] does while they do this “important work” out in the world...it’s not a gender specific thing, it’s just the one who works. So our relationship took a hit cause she just treated what I did as simple and every day and not very important. Society kind of*
treated this the same way because I’m a man. For some reason doing the exact same work as a woman, I just lost respect. (Carl, age-34, 3 children)

I think things kind of changed a little bit with my wife and I. (Greg, age-39, 2 children)

I do think that it affected my wife and my relationship after a while... I think that although she didn’t ever technically say this it almost seemed like she lost a little bit of respect for me or something. I think she acted differently about it even though she understood what was going on. (Hiram, age-48, 1 child)

They spoke in detail about the relationships with their children and the value added and resulting rewards to them, their children and their families in general, making statements like:

With my kids, oh, they love me. And it completely transformed my house inside.

I’m closer with my kids than any of my male friends who go to work. (Carl, age-34, 3 children)

I’m known to be more like a party type person more than a stay at home dad so for them [my family] that was kind of hard for them to put together. But, it made us stronger, our bond. For us to get closer to each other. (Nick, age-51, 2 children)

“With my children I think it changed cause I think our bonds grew stronger because I could spend more time with them” (Greg, age-39, 2 children)

It doesn’t embarrass [my daughter] or anything like that about me being at home. They [the kids] seem to really love it that I am there after school, and that they
don't have to stay at the YMCA or aftercare after school. (Ben, age- 48, 2 children)

Being at home helped her [my adopted daughter] and I build a relationship. She finds that she can come to me with just about anything. And with [my son], I am teaching him to be a man. To be a man that not only plays sports but one that treats people with respect. (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

While most of the experiences were positive, one father shared an example of how he felt his son was perhaps influenced in a more negative way because of his status as stay-at-home father.

When [my son] was little and people asked him what he wants to be when he grows up he would say, 'I want to be like my dad and stay at home and raise the kids'. It seemed like his teachers and friends wouldn’t accept that answer you know they’d say don’t you want to be an astronaut or that kind of thing, and they kind of changed his mind. (Ben, age- 48, 2 children)

They also talked about some of their interactions with peers and family members sharing both their positive and not so positive experiences, exemplified in statements like:

I think that the relationships improved across the board when you have more time to spend on them. Which is what everybody needs as a whole. (David, age- 40, 4 children)

I think a lot of my friend are um jealous of me I get to stay home (mumble). I mean stay home. I don’t have to go to work every day. (Kevin, age- 31, 1 child)
My family, they’re happy. My wife’s mom stayed home with her when she was a baby and my mom stayed home with me, so having someone stay home is a big benefit and I think that they are happy that I get to do it. (Kevin, age-31, 1 child)

As far as outside of my immediate family ah... I think I’m pretty well received and looked at as a good guy who has stepped up to the plate and watched the kids during the day and you know I mean we do things and have a fun time and you know we are always learning and getting things stuff like that so I think that people look at me fondly and say there’s a good dad. (Ethan, age-34, 3 children)

At first it affected my relationship with my parents ummm... they both were a different generation and they didn’t believe in the guy staying at home and the wife working, but ah.... They came around to it once they realized how much time I got to spend with them and the quality time that they missed (Leon, age-43, 2 children)

I noticed when I go to pick the kids up at school, I would usually be the only male out there and I would befriend the other moms and it just seemed so stereotypical that we would talk and exchange recipes and that kind of stuff. Things that I never thought that I would do. I found myself doing what I would typically think of as a, you know a “soccer mom” or that kind of thing. Sometimes I surprise myself when I hear the words coming out of my mouth. (Ben, age-48, 2 children)

Negotiating Balance

The accepted culture of masculinity in the United States is focused on career success and the ability to financially provide for family. Although there has been a shift over the past generation, these stereotypes continue to make it challenging for men to
move away from their aspirations of being the family provider (Doucet, 2009). As more men are in the position of being primary caregiver in their families, social perceptions and stigma associated with the role continue to plague these fathers.

Behind their backs and sometimes to their faces, these stay-at-home fathers are questioned and criticized for taking on the role of a responsible father, taking care of his children and keeping the home running so that his spouse can focus on whatever it is that is their primary source of income. The dominant discourse surrounding stay-at-home fatherhood is that men are not the nurturers, it is not “normal” for fathers to stay home to take care of the family, rather that he is “helping out” with childcare or that something is wrong with him. He is stereotyped in the image of the first popular culture stay-at-home-father, Michael Keaton in his role as “Mr. Mom”, and these fathers at home are in effect trying to be a new version of mother (Petroski, 2006). Petroski sites scholars Connell (2000), Fiske (1987) and Mumby (1998) who remind us that masculinity is tied to work, achievement and successful performance as breadwinner, and fathers who do otherwise are feminized because the work they do as caregivers is considered feminine work (Kimmell, 1987; Trujillio, 1991; Vavrus, 2002).

This discourse is a factor in the shaping of self-concepts of many of the fathers in this study as fathers, men and workers. Several of the stay-at-home father typologies identified demonstrate representations of Schrock and Schwalbe’s (2009) “manhood act,” behaviors claiming privilege, eliciting deference, and resisting exploitation as signs of masculinity.

All of the fathers were asked to describe a typical day in their experience as a stay-at-home father. Although their answers varied, there were many commonalities. For
example, for the fathers with younger children much of the day revolved around meals, naps, and entertainment. Household chores and errands seem to be strategically placed during the day. While many of the fathers in this sample had older, school age children the daily activities and focus was much the same. Meals, preparation for school, and after school routines were a big part of the day. See Table 2 for a composite look at the typical day of this sample of stay-at-home fathers.

*It's there again there's the stereotype of the man and you watch your kid it's not a daycare or you're not babysitting. Your responsible for everything when you become the stay at home parent. It's not just the physical part of making sure that their bathed, and dressed and fed, and it's you are you are a psychologist as well trying to develop their minds as well as making sure that they are physically ok. And I think that's kind of a big misconception of being a stay at home parent.*

[You] think that you put them down for naps and feed them and everything else takes care of itself. (Leon, age-43, 2 children)

*It was basically getting up at 5:45, my ex would be getting ready for work herself. I'd be getting the kids ready for school, cooking breakfast, and they would be out the door, my youngest would be out the door at 7:30. My day until 11:30 when he got home was essentially cleaning, prepping dinner, running errands, grocery shopping and stuff. When he got home it was working with him on his special needs, any appointments he had. My other two go to school right down here so they get home around 2-2:10. [I'd be] just here at the house typically. I tried to get out [with them] to go to the park as much as I could* (Carl, age-34, 3 children)
While some of the spouses were involved in the day to day care of children and household chores, many fathers talked about their day in terms of juggling, responsibilities, establishing routines and learning how to do what may not come naturally. Examples representing these fathers’ experiences include:

I am usually up around 5:30 or quarter to 6 and I come down and you know start the day. I wake them up for school feed them breakfast, walk them to the bus stop and then when I come back my wife is usually leaving within a few minutes and ah... and then they go off to school and I do my chore work. (Leon, 43, 2 children)

I did everything...get up like 6, get him ready, feed him breakfast, and all that stuff. Bring him to school. Staying at home all day, it’s harder than any other job I have ever had. So then you know, clean, do all the dishes and all that you know wash clothes. It’s hard, there’s a lot of stuff to do. Vacuuming, all the stuff that I hate, and I hate doing. I’d much rather be at work, but somebody has to do it. (Hiram, age-48, 1 child)

Let’s talk about school years, I’d get up make sure that they are up and prepared and off to school when they were at school. For a while I would do stuff around the house, keeping the house clean, making dinner laundry, you know household stuff. I’d go food shopping and um for a while I it was my responsibility to go pick up my daughter from school and stuff like that. (Mario, age- 48, 2 children)

A typical day was you know get up. My wife would go to work. We’d do breakfast, maybe do some playing, watch TV, and usually by late morning, I would you know start praying for nap time, and trying to do whatever it took for
nap time to happen. Because it was the one time in the day when I got a little bit of a break. (Ian, age-38, 1 child)

Fathers also frequently mentioned the double standard that exists between men and women who work outside of the home in respect to expectations about how family responsibilities are delegated after 5 PM and weekends. Carl shared from his experience:

*I think a lot of people in stereotypical roles where the man goes to work and the woman stays home . . . she’s home and there’s a reason why when I say woman’s work people know what I am talking about. I think it is a stupid term, a stupid way to say that, but people know what that means. You know, cooking and cleaning. So “women’s work” That was my job, but unlike women who did the women’s work when the weekend came they didn’t have to do the “man’s work. So my life would be cooking and cleaning and baking pumpkin bread and doing homework and clipping fingernails and cleaning ears and then Saturday would come and I’m cleaning gutters and fixing bikes. I had to do both and I think with women that work, this is all from talking to other stay-at-home dads, they get home and they don’t feel the pressure to have to do a lot of work at the house- The “man’s work”. If the guy that’s staying home does what he’s supposed to do and the house is pretty clean and well taken care of like he’s supposed to be doing, she shouldn’t have to do a whole lot when she gets home of the “women’s work”. So at least in my experience and with a couple of my friends, our wives would just come home and just kick their feet up while we did almost everything and then the weekend comes we’d be out getting our backs burnt doing “man’s work” while she’s kind of just hanging out with the kids. (Carl, age-34, 3 children)*
Hiram shared a similar experience with his spouse:

...she was tired and one of us was going to do something and she said well you should do it because you really haven’t had to do anything all day. And I was like what do you mean I haven’t had to do anything all day? if I said that to you the wife you’d say you’re a jerk because that’s not valuing anything I did all day, but its ok for you to say that to me cause I’m a guy that you’re saying that. But if it was a reverse situation then I would be an asshole for saying, ‘well you don’t do anything at home’ even though you know you did a whole hell of a lot. And he [my son] heard us arguing about it. And said, “Mom, Dad did all kinds of stuff today and started listing all these things I did. (Hiram, age-48, 1 child)

Table 2. Composite Typical Day in the Life of a Stay-at-Home Father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:30 – 6:30 AM</td>
<td>Fathers are up and getting themselves ready for the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30 – 7:30 AM</td>
<td>Getting children up, dressed, fed and off to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 – 8:00 AM</td>
<td>Working spouses are leaving home for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00–11:30 AM</td>
<td>Playtime/nap time for children not in school Errands and housework for fathers with school age children Work from home time for those fathers who had other employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 1:00 PM</td>
<td>Lunch and Nap time for fathers with smaller children House chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 – 4:00 PM</td>
<td>Getting children from school, Afternoon snacks and homework time, chores, outside activities,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 – 7:00 PM</td>
<td>Family dinner playtime Many of the spouses were home by this time and also participated in the family dinner and after dinner activities. Some fathers used this time for school or work outside of the home once their spouse returned from work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 – 8:00 PM</td>
<td>Bath and bedtime routines (families with younger children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>Outside work, preparation for the next day, time with partner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges

Recognizing that values, meaningful work, leisure, money, and security shape how people make choices about work and career. These reasons can be considered discursive frames by which people craft their stories related to work (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2012). Drawing meaning and identity from work can potentially fuel a greater sense of ethical, sustainable work patterns as well as a stronger level of engagement and motivation for work. Carlson and Lynch (2009) argue that quantitative research on the relationship between gender ideology, in other words, one’s belief regarding men’s and women’s appropriate family roles and the division of housework share a reciprocal relationship and is important. Ones’ values and individual convictions serve as guiding principles in the understanding of attitudes and behaviors of individuals and how they integrate their personality and regulate their behaviors (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). The incorporation of values into the exploration of work and family is important in understanding how individuals organize meaning and action in the creating their role definitions (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). Life role values as defined by Carlson & Kacmar (2000) manifest themselves in the manner in which individuals describe themselves when introduced to others. The importance of the role to an individual impacts the choices and decisions he or she makes. In the case of stay-at home fathers, their involvement in the role and the conflicts they experience between the balance of the stigma associated with their work and family roles creates stresses. As they become more or less satisfied with their position Carlson and Kacmar (2000) argue that self-image becomes involved, and the more invested one is in his primary domain, increased levels of life satisfaction are experienced. Duckworth and Buzzanell (2007) in their research questioning how some
men construct their identities as fathers around discursive possibilities in their work-family lives identified three primary themes related to the (a) positioning of identities within work-family, (b) identity work in work-family negotiations, and (c) performing good father identities within particular life circumstances. This study focused on stay-at-home fathers also sought to answer the research question asking what narratives stay-at-home fathers create to help them negotiate and balance issues of gender, identity, work and family. Using this as a basis, reviewing the stories of the fathers interviewed in this study, additional common themes seemed to emerge in regard to how these fathers talked about their role, and found justification for what they were doing.

Fathers, regardless of where they are on the continuum of choice also must deal with their acceptance of their stay-at-home father role and the associated stigma. They shared stories that tended to center around several common themes related to how they justified, or balanced issues of gender, identity, work and family. Some of the fathers talked about how tough the transition was and what they thought contributed to those difficulties. They also talked about their motivations for pushing forward and the rewards they felt their families gained as a result of them being home.

In questioning fathers about challenges they faced as stay-at-home fathers many talked about their traditional family values, cultural and gender norms that appear to conflict with families working within an alternative structure. One father, Adam emphatically stated in response to the question “Is there anything else that you’d like to share?”

*I think that by turning those kinds of gender roles on their head it changes the culture. It changes the culture one family at a time. They no longer buy into the*
Honeymooners, Flintstones, that Mad Men kind of mentality. They [our kids] don’t buy into that shit. They don’t have a buy in their buy in is whoever has a hand that’s free does the chore ... it’s a very different kind of mentality and I think that it’s got its pros and cons. Pros that we start treating people like equals and cons that it makes life a little more complex than that idyllic ‘Leave it to Beaver’ mentality. (Adam, age-38, 4 children)

As the fathers shared stories and information they provided insights that reflected on how they supported their daily maintenance of identity and self-concept in relation to their role as stay-at-home fathers. Several common themes appeared throughout the fathers’ interviews. Some of the ways that fathers seemed to cope with their positions at home and the challenges they face was to create narratives that helped them more easily justify their position. Common stories emerged that focused on their reasons why. Many of these elements emerged as fathers responded to questions about their relationships with spouses and children, challenges they faced, and strategies they used to help them as they navigated unfamiliar areas of home and childcare. Some fathers spoke about being at home in ways that framed being a stay-at-home father as a noble gesture, others referenced their shared choice in making the decision to stay at home, and still others focused on the financial necessity, and finally there were the fathers who spoke about their role as stay-at-home father in a more temporary way, indicating that being at home was a stop gap until they could get back to more traditional work.

Some of the fathers spoke of their staying at home in terms of a choice that served a higher purpose or for the good of the family. For several of the fathers’ their choice to support the family through their role at home allowed their spouses to pursue career
goals, or serve in the military. Statements made by some of these fathers emerged when they responded to questions about their relationships with spouses and children, included:

*Getting up in the middle of the middle of the night for your partner so she doesn’t have to because she works.* (Kevin, age-31, 1 child)

*I want to be here home for him and I want to be able to go to his football games and when he’s not in football he does Karate, so I want to be able to be a part of that and be able to take him to those things and do that sort of stuff.* (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

*Typically the father is the head of the household, but you’ve got the mom working to earn the keep and the dad is gonna stay at home there’s a little bit of a role reversal in that where she’s bringing home the bacon and the father/husband needs to respect that and not demean that or say you’re making me look bad because you’ve got a job and I don’t. That has to go out the window and [he has to] say this is my job I’m working at a 365/24/7 job. I’m still the head but I share that with my spouse who goes off to work.* (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

*If you follow what God wants you to do it will be the right thing because you are following in a path that is set for you by what God wants you to do.* (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

Fathers also spoke of being at home as their choice, perhaps something that they may not have initially intended, but found that it fulfilled a desire to be very involved in the lives of their children. They shared statements such as:
The funny thing about that that comes to mind for me is that I wonder if the reason for the stay at home father is important. Whether you have to because the mother’s salary is just too good to do it otherwise, or whether say the father was making more money, but always wanted to be a stay at home dad. I never felt that I was forced into it. (Frank, age-57, 2 children)

At the time I remember thinking what could be better? How many children have their mother 52% of the time to be fair and fathers 48% of the time. That’s what I’m thinking 60-40. I’m thinking most children have their mothers 80% of the time and their fathers 20% or less. I mean what could be better than that. It just wasn’t that problematic for me. (Frank, age-57, 2 children)

I think it is a valuable thing to have whether you do it full time or whether you do it partially. I don’t think there are more fathers caring for them I think they are more involved. (Greg, age-39, 2 children)

Definitely there is a difference in choice, but I think that there are two things that drive that - One is choice and then the other obviously is income, so if you are independently wealthy you can do anything you want you could be a stay at home dad because you can if you want to. If you don’t have the income then it’s about choice. How much time do you want to spend with them? How flexible do you want to make your life? (Greg, age-39, 2 children)

To be truthful I don’t really consider myself to be a stay at home dad. I work and I’m with my children. I get to be with my children I guess outsiders would say, yeah he’s a stay at home dad, but you know I don’t work and I can clean, I cook dinner you know 12 out of 14 nights, I pack lunches before I go to work in the
morning and I can rock the baby to sleep and put her in the crib. I can change a diaper, look at kids’ drawings and do it all and I do it very modestly and I send pictures and things to my wife during the day to let her see parts of what’s going on during the day. (Ethan, age-34, 3 children)

There were also fathers who identified the circumstances connected to their time at home and used that to help keep them focused until the time when their role as stay-at-home father would end. Some also seemed to view their time at home as something that had to be done, or endured.

We juggle it. It’s complex, and it’s busy, but there are so many moving parts to keep track of. I’m so used to that, so it’s... you know... we just do it! (Adam, age-38, 4 children)

I definitely had a timeline. We didn’t have a day, but until the job... a full time job came along and then I didn’t want to do it anymore. So, I mean, I wanted to do it until I got a full time job and then I never wanted to have to do it again. (Hiram, age-48, 1 child)

It’s kind of up in the air. It’s always been back and forth about what role. The roles are constantly changing. (David, age-40, 4 children)

She was in the military and I wasn’t, so the roles changed. I take care of the kids because somebody had to take care of them when she was out. (Nick, age-51, 2 children)

Stay-At-Home Fatherhood and Work

Fatherhood and work are central to the dominant cultural values in the United States in regard to men’s roles (LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan & Jaret, 1991;
Townsend, 2002). In this sample of fathers whether they worked outside of the home or were focused solely on the care of children and home, the importance of their “work” in providing for the family was emphasized. Work for these fathers took a variety of forms and included balancing being a stay-at-home father and “working” from home, being a stay-at-home father and “working” hours outside of the home, as well as being a stay-at-home father whose “work” is home. In all respects, fathers talked about the balancing required and the realization of how much work is involved in being a stay-at-home parent. One father emphatically stated, “You don’t realize how much work it is until you actually have to do it. It’s a full time job” (Adam, age-38, 4 children)! Other fathers shared how they initially thought of being a stay-at-home father as a break from the daily grind of work until they were actually in the role. One father shared how his perception changed and how once he changed his perceptions his ability to fulfill the responsibilities of his role improved. Jake shared,

*I just didn’t think of it as a job. At first I just thought of it as a break from reality. I thought I work all of these years and this is my out, this is my break. I don’t have to work anymore. Then it hit me. You really need to work or you’ll get swallowed up by this. Once I thought of it as a job it went a lot better.* (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

Or that,

*[Being a stay-at-home father] definitely gave me a lot more appreciation for full time parents, primary caregivers. You know that there is always that sense before you actually do it that [it] must be nice watching soap operas, and you put the kid in the bouncy chair. It definitely showed me that is not at all what it is like. It is*
exhausting and chaotic and you worry. It’s just so many things. I definitely looked forward to going back to work so I could have a break. It [being the stay-at-home father] definitely changed my perspective on parenting and how difficult it is. (Ian, age- 38, 1 child)

Another father, David, had thoughts in the opposite direction and shared that what he was doing at home neither he nor his family considered work or a job because, as he said, “It’s just what you do… parenting. It’s just parenting. It’s not necessarily a job because you can quit a job. I guess it depends on how you define a job” (David, age- 40, 4 children). For him, monetary compensation and choice to quit were the defining differences between what he was doing at home and “work”. Fathers also applied the concept of work in their interactions with their children depending on their ages.

Several fathers shared how they used this opportunity at home to help teach their children about the value of work, and having a strong work ethic. Shared in statements like:

[My son] understands that you have to have money to run a household. He understands that his job is to be good in school and our job is to ensure that he has everything he needs to do his job. (Ethan, age- 34, 3 children)

The kids don’t have an out they have jobs they have work to do in the house and if you don’t do the work you don’t get paid. They need to learn to be responsible they need to learn what it means to earn a dollar and the value of the dollar and where it comes from and how to get that. (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

“My kids, sometimes they learned what to do by our example, but they [also] learned what not to do. (Mario, age-48, 2 children)
In talking to these fathers about their concerns about reintegrating into the workforce if they were not currently working, it became evident that their lives and careers prior to becoming the stay-at-home parent were not to be discounted, and this temporary interruption in their work/career history should not create problems for them once they are ready to return to work. One father when asked about concerns about going back to work said, “I enjoyed my job so it’s not like I didn’t like to work . . . I’ve been working since I was 16-years old” (Kevin, age-31, 1 child). While other fathers were concerned about the idea of reentering the workforce, particularly those fathers who had been in the SAHF role for an extended period of time. They expressed not only concern about the challenges facing them, but concerns about their age, level of experience, as well as how difficult it might be based on how they have changed and grown as a result of their experiences through statements like:

*I think about that a lot. I thought that once [my youngest] was in full days of school that I would be able to get a job, but then [my wife] kind of wants me to be available to pick them up at 3 o’clock and if I get a job I won’t be able to do that. Picking them up and maybe dropping them off will be a problem. And then with my age, I am almost 50 and I don’t have a degree yet and I am thinking well, I am gonna have to go back to school it just seems like I am running out of time.* (Ben, age-48, 2 children)

*I think it will be harder just because I think my perspective on the world and life has changed so much through this experience.* (Leon, age-43, 2 children)
CORE FINDINGS

Wood (2003) tells us that it is difficult to come up with language for discussing general differences in communication patterns. Changing demographics, values, and models of career and work point toward changing roles for both working mothers and fathers in our society; while contemporary ideals and expectations of fatherhood are being challenged, with fathers at home are struggling to build a sense of acceptance and level of credibility and legitimacy in the home that women have enjoyed. It is clear that these stay-at-home fathers varied in important ways in the extent to which they accepted, described and executed their roles as stay at home fathers. The interviews provide data that argue for the conclusion that the concept of “stay-at-home” father is not monolithic. Rather it seems that various dimensions related to the degree of perceived agency in the decision to stay at home, and the degree to which ideas of parenting and fatherhood are influenced by traditional models lie underneath the discourses of stay-at-home fathers.

My analysis of the interview data revealed differences in fathers’ level of acceptance of their role at home resulting in four types of stay-at-home fathers among these men. That is, these types are grounded in a representation of fathers along a continuum based on their level of acceptance of their role dependent on the amount of perceived choice, and their identification and participation based on their degree of integration of traditional models of parenting and fatherhood. Most of the fathers recognized and acknowledged stigma associated with the role of stay-at-home father, but differed in how they chose to manage the stigma. The four types of stay-at-home father identified in this study were labeled as follows: Revolutionary, Reformer, Reluctant, and Resentful. These labels vary in the extent to which these men embraced the stay-at-home
role (from fully to not at all). See Table 3 for a graphic depiction of the stay at home father continuum and Graph 2 for a representation of the percentages of SAHFs from the sample falling into each category. As described in the next section, all four roles have important implications for future study of communication among stay-at-home fathers.

**Table 3. Stay-at-Home Father Typology Continuum**
CLASSIFYING STAY-AT-HOME FATHER TYPES

After repeated readings of the interviews, and following the grounded theory procedures described earlier in Chapter 2, and considering all of the responses, one main dimension emerged as well as four types of stay at home fathers arrayed on it. A second coder was used in the development of this scheme that included extensive discussion and revisions until a grounded, logical structure emerged. After repeated readings the primary dimension that characterized this sample of men was grounded in their level of acceptance of the SAHF role varying from fully embracing it to resenting it. Most of the fathers recognized and acknowledged that stigma was associated with the role of stay-at-home father, but how they chose to communicatively manage the stigma was influential in the development of the types of SAHFs that emerged. The labels chosen for these types are intended to capture the
Revolutionary Stay-at-Home Father

The Revolutionary stay-at-home father is one who doesn’t accept traditional ideas or expectations of the role as a stay-at-home father and challenges traditional beliefs about “fatherhood” and associated norms by vocally expressing his alternative beliefs that seek to redefine the role. Fathers in this sample are fairly clear in articulating their definition of this role. Revolutionary stay-at-home fathers, when asked what the term “stay-at-home father” meant to them, responded in the third person with statements like “The father is taking care of the children during certain hours of the day” (Frank, age-57, 2 children), or, “It’s kind of instead of the traditional guy goes to work every day and mom stays home with the kids, more so the dad is with the kids during the work day” (Ethan, age-34, 3 children). Revolutionary stay-at-home fathers used language that differentiated them from the community of stay-at-home fathers, using third-person phrasing like “The father,” “The dad.” and they also attempted to keep themselves connected to traditional masculine fathers. If asked directly about their role at home, these fathers were more likely to respond by problematizing the label of stay-at-home “father,” and preferring the title of stay-at-home parent or just “parent”. One revolutionary SAHF stated, “I told people I was a stay-at-home parent. I don’t ever think I used ‘dad’” (Carl, age-34, 3 children). In dialectical terms, these fathers remained strongly connected to both their outside-the-home work roles (many continued to work twenty or more hours outside of the home), and they also held down the primary responsibility for child-care while spouses or partners also worked. “I didn’t really
consider myself a stay at home dad simply because I have a career.” (Adam, age-38, 4 children) Ethan (age -34, 3 children) said, “I do work...I work and I stay at home with the kids.”

Revolutionary stay-at-home fathers acknowledged and accepted the stigma associated with the stay-at-home father role. However, they embraced the SAHF job but also did not widely communicate about membership in the SAHF group per se. Revolutionary fathers tended to feel more prepared for the role based on their own merit or some type of education such as degrees in education, psychology, sociology, or job related training in from fields like healthcare, and management. While they reported that they may make use of family support, they have less of a reliance on family during their time at home, particularly in regard to mothers or mother–in-laws as a source of information. Fathers in this group tended to view and define their wives more as “partners” in the experience of parenting, “You know, we’re a team, so it’s not like it’s just me doing it. It’s definitely like her taking care of things and me taking care of things that’s what you got’ ta do to raise a family.” Because extended family involvement was limited, fathers felt that there was less pressure and expectations; “we could do things anyway we wanted to. We did things in a very unusual way” (Frank, age-57, 2 children). One Revolutionary father, used as an example of how prepared he felt; he had “always been good with children, but was not formally trained in homemaking or childcare . . . I was just confident that I could do it” (Frank, age-57, 2 children). Another Revolutionary stay-at-home father shared, “I’d say I felt very prepared. I come from a big family . . . There’s always babies around” (Ethan, age-34, 3 children).
Revolutionary stay-at-home fathers to some degree felt liberated from the “traps that a lot of mothers fall into who are heavily influenced” by their mothers, grandmothers or other women in their lives. “I wasn’t confronted with a lot of the idealistic tyrannies [like] a mother has to be this, or would do anything to be it [whatever the ideal is], so much so that it becomes tyrannical” (Frank, age-57, 2 children). Revolutionary fathers may fight against the influences of family, society, and their cultural and religious backgrounds, however, social, cultural, and religious affiliations do influence how these fathers interpret their role. One Revolutionary father spoke passionately about his church’s stance on gender roles and family roles and how their particular family situation was “kind of quirky and revolutionary” in the way that it directly challenged more traditional values associated with their religious and cultural background.

*In [The Church] gender roles and family roles are very much 1950’s ‘Mad Men’. Women get together with women, there is separation of the sexes and there’s not only separation of gender, but there are also gender roles. Women stay home and take are of kids and men go do an 8 to 5.... There are very set ideas about what this one should do and that one should do and by [us] saying it doesn’t work that way it completely throws that on their heads and they have to come up with a new and different understanding of how they view the world. (Adam, age-38, 4 children)*

This father’s view of his role and the overall family dynamic creates a situation that directly challenges the way his children and people who interact with them might perceive family, and fatherhood. Goffman (1963) says that in constructing a personal identification of an individual we make use of aspects of his social identity as well as
everything else that is associated with the individual and the stigma and effort to conceal it become fixed as part of the personal identity. According to Goffman’s (1963) work on stigma those who deviate from the “system of reference” are seen as in some way deviant and voluntarily declining to openly accept the social place accorded them. These individuals “act irregularly and somewhat rebelliously in connection with our basic institutions such as the family, stereotyped role divisions between the sexes, and legitimate full time employment” (p.143). Goffman labels those who on their own take this stand and are seen as eccentric or characters as “disaffiliates” (p 143), social deviants who openly display their refusal to accept their place. Stay-at-home fathers who fit this definition then might be seen as deviant, but in the case of this exploration of roles, their approach and identification is more akin to being revolutionary.

Reformer Stay-at-Home Father

The Reformer stay-at-home father is one who accepts the role and acknowledges the stigma, however, at the same time accepts the model that they are a substitute within a mostly traditional feminized system of caregiving roles. However, they also seek to tweak the stay-at-home role by implementing changes to the largely feminine system and standard ideologies associated with the traditional model and expectations of men and fathers in the stay at home role identified by the notions of fathers as “part-time caregiver,” or “babysitters,” fathers not being nurturing, and fathers like as “Mr. Mom”. These fathers when asked about their role immediately respond that they are stay-at-home fathers, or stay-at-home dads. They spoke with pride about being in the stay-at-home father role; however, they measured the importance of their function by comparing it to women’s roles. “I told the truth, I said basically, um, I’m a stay at home dad. I answered
it just like that. Honestly, it is the most important thing I have done in my life, so there was no hesitation or no embarrassment on my part you know women do it” (Mario, age-48, 2 children).

These fathers do feel some connection individually to the larger group of stay-at-home fathers but struggle with the stigmatized social perceptions of men and masculinity. One father shared, “being raised by steel workers, the ‘men’s men’, they all ask me what are you doing? I think honestly the stay at home dad, we’re just misunderstood” (Carl, age-34, 3 children).

In talking about their role, these fathers speak in terms of ‘We’, including themselves within the community of stay-at-home fathers. “We are the primary care regarding the kids and the household.” These fathers identify their participation in the family through their stay-at-home role as a choice, influenced positively or negatively by relationships with their own fathers, or other men in their lives. One father shared:

_Growing up my dad other than spending time with us on the weekends, or if he was on vacation, he didn’t really ... he never did the stay at home dad thing... My dad was a salesman and he was gone all week and only home on the weekends. It was my intention that when I had children to spend a lot of time with them. I wasn’t planning to do it full time, but...um, it was in my plans._ (Greg, age-39, 2 children)

While another father said, “I remember thinking that I didn’t know if I could do it and I always wanted to be a better father than my father.” (Carl, age-34, 3 children) and yet another father spoke of not having a father figure in the home when he was a child as a
challenge for him in his stay at home role, “I was brought up in a single family home, so I
don’t know what a father is . . . I grew up with my mom” (Nick, age-51, 2 children).

These fathers are comfortable in their role as stay-at-home father and are able to
make light of the fact that they are performing what they see as a feminine gender role.
During the interview process, these fathers frequently shared their mistakes, and what
they learned. They were able to laugh at themselves but also recognized the value in what
they were doing and how their roles and perceptions of them in the roles were affected by
stereotypes of men at home. One father said, “I just did my best not to screw them up.
They are great kids in spite of me... you just have to love them and be
supportive and do the best you can” (Mario, age-48, 2 children). And another father felt
that his being at home offered his children a greater insight to work and a perspective that
wasn’t based on perceptions of masculine and feminine roles in families. He said:

_I come from chest beating, NASCAR watching guys. I mean you can’t get
anymore “manly”... so I think that it will be easier for [the kids] to do what they
want to do with their lives... they’re not gonna be worried about me looking at
them saying ...oh, this is your role why aren’t you doing it._ (Carl, age-34, 3
children)

Another perspective shared was a very personal story about the societal impact and
challenges of being at home and the only caregiver for his children. Because of a change
in the marital relationship and “the perception that a man can’t possibly be the only
caregiver for his children,” he has had to prove that he is competent and capable, even
though he has been successful in the stay-at-home father role for years. He elaborated in
regard to the justifications as caregiver that he has had to provide:
Despite being a SAHD for such a long time, I have very happy, healthy kids. They’re great and there’s never been anything in our history that would preclude me from doing that [caring for them] other than being a man. (Carl, age-34, 3 children)

When asked how he responded to the question what do you do, one father related, “I’m a housewife; I’m a full time dad” (Nick, age-51, 2 children). Many of these fathers tended to create their ideal based on what they know or learned from their mothers or from their own family history. Several fathers shared their thoughts about distinctions between men’s work and women’s work while not trying to minimize the stay at home role. One father said:

I’m a great believer in equality of the sexes, and all that... and I am not trying to minimize staying at home and taking care of the children because it is a lot. I’m just saying for men who are doing it, it’s nothing compared to what women have been doing for decades.” (Mario, age-48, 2 children)

Reformer fathers may not have felt prepared, but took an active role in learning what it meant and how to be successful in the role and many were open to sharing what they learned, and bits of advice with other fathers who might be considering making the choice to be a stay-at-home father. These fathers looked for resources to help them be better prepared for this new role. What they noted was that in terms of available resources, there were few. One reformer stay-at-home father said:

There are funny books like, Daddy, where’s your vagina? And My Daddy Stays Home” [with] funny anecdotal stories of dads being kind of goofy and not knowing what to do, but there are a million books on how to be a stay-at-home
mom. But when you read those they are all geared towards women. There’s nothing really seriously geared toward men. (Carl, age-34, 3 children)

Another father shared, “I bought a lot of different parenting book. There’s not or at least not then there wasn’t a whole lot out there on being a stay-at-home dad. There’s just a different dynamic to that” (Leon, age-43, 2 children).

These fathers see themselves as improving on the role of stay-at-home father by adding something extra to the experience of rearing children and taking care of the home due solely to the fact that they are men. Their feeling is that being a stay-at-home dad is like being a stay-at-home mom, but different:

I just do guy things, I don’t think that we need to do what mom’s do because why? Why do we have to? It’s not much different than the stay at home mom except that I think that men can offer a little bit different perspective on things. I think that there’s more to what SAHDs bring to the table than stay-at-home moms, not because they don’t want to, but just because moms and dads are different. (Jake, age-52, 2 children)

Reluctant Stay-at-Home-Father

The Reluctant stay-at-home father is identified as one who communicates that he is conflicted in his stay-at-home role. He recognizes and to varying degrees accepts the social stigma associated with being a stay at home father, but is not sure about his identity in connection with the role. These fathers live with the stigma, but also deflect the stigmatization by not fully playing the role, or not identifying with the general group of stay-at-home fathers. These fathers see their position and function within the family as their responsibility and for the most part have taken on the role of stay at home father due
to external circumstances. These fathers typically use traditional models of family to support their understanding of the role. Although this is the most diverse group of fathers, in terms of their acceptance of the role and the associated stigma, these fathers can be characterized by their hesitance in regard to how they approach their position in the family and the accompanying responsibilities associated with it.

When these fathers are asked about the meaning of the term stay-at-home father, they offered responses that separated themselves from this particular group of fathers. They do use identifiers like “father”, “caregiver,” and but they primarily chose representations of themselves as separated from the role of stay-at-home father; such a role belongs to others not to them, or someone other than the individual responding to the question. These responses to the question can be seen as a projection of how they see themselves in relation to the group of stay-at-home fathers (Severin & Tankard, 1979). Specific responses included, “A father who takes care of the household” (David, age-40, 4 children), “the primary caregiver” (Ian, age-38, 1 child) and “You would be the primary caregiver. (Greg, age-39, 2 children)” However, depending on where these fathers fell across the continuum, some also identified and responded more personally with “I” statements such as:

- I am the person that takes care of the home gets the meals does the household chores like laundry and dishes and cleaning up and vacuuming that kind of thing.
- Also I’m available if the kids [pause] forget anything... I’m available pretty much 24 hours 7 days a week. (Ben, age-48, 2 children)

These fathers defined their role in relation to their understanding based on what they have seen their mothers or other women doing. Their model for stay-at-home fatherhood is
based on fully on variations of motherhood. “You are pretty much the same as the mom would be...in my mind the mom has a petty busy job if it is the dad who is staying at home” (Leon, age-43, 2 children). Another father shared, “I’m the baby in my family. In fact our oldest son and the one I watched is only the second baby I ever held in my entire life. So I was a new parent and it was kind of a learning experience. So yeah, I felt pretty unprepared.” ... “I got advice from my mom and my [wife’s] mom. My [wife] was real supportive and helpful.” (Ian, age-38, 1 child)

There is a range of level of preparedness and expectations about the role in these fathers from feeling not prepared at all to feeling somewhat prepared. One father shared:

I would say not prepared at all. When you think of being the stay at home parent you think you are going to have time to do this and that, buy a golf membership and whatever else, and, it turned out to be the exact opposite. It was definitely more work than if I had a traditional job where I was working. (Leon, age-43, 2 children)

On the opposite side of the scale, another father shared that his training and preparation was what he learned at home helping to care for younger siblings. “My mom was a stay-at-home mom so I saw her do it and I learned from her.” (Kevin, age-31, 1 child)

The challenges faced by these fathers reflected their feelings of lack of control in dealing with certain situations due to their limited knowledge, preparation, experience or resources, and also dealing with stereotypes and prejudices associated with their stay-at home father role. Some of the specific examples fathers shared included statements like, “Just not enough time in the day to get everything done that I need to do” (Ben, age-48, 2 children), or one of the challenges for me was “developing routines,” (David, age-40, 4
children) and one father honestly shared his struggle with wanting to do a good job and not feeling like he had adequate resources or preparation to meet the expectations of his role. He reported:

*The biggest challenges for me were ... not just trying to take the easy way out. What I wanted to do would be to strap him in and put him in front of the TV you know and throw him some cheerios every once in a while, [laughing] that is what I wanted to do, so I think that the toughest thing for me was to think of things to do. Enriching things to try to interact when deep down in my gut just as shameful as it is was to say I just wanted him to just leave me alone. [silent pause] Initially it wasn’t that way but after weeks of the same thing every single day...* (Ian, age-38, 1 child)

Some of the fathers in this group have had time to adjust to the role to some degree have accepted it and established some level of comfort with their function.

*My wife’s mom stayed home with her when she was a baby and my mom stayed home with me... so having someone stay home is a big benefit and I think that they are happy that I get to do it. Umm...and my wife makes more money than me, so it makes sense for me to do it and not for her. I felt pretty ready. I don’t think anything prepared me I just think that you have to be a responsible adult”* (David, age-40, 4 children)

They did, however, uniformly express mixed feelings about the role. They identified that they “enjoyed” spending time with their children, but felt “discomfort” with the negative perceptions that others held of them. One father summed his thoughts up by saying,
I think for me the main thing was the perspectives. The ideas that people have not just about SAHDs, but stay-at-home parents you know. How demanding it is how exhausting and that when a dad does it, there's that stigma that it is just different that it's unnatural that it should be the mom. I grew up with a stay at home mom. My dad worked all the time and my mom never worked and so just to try to get past that, it's weird for it to be the dad. (Ian, age-38, 1 child)

**Resentful Stay-at-Home Father**

The Resentful stay-at-home is identified as one who rejects the stigmatized role and must perform the role or participate as a SAHF against his will, primarily due to external circumstances. These fathers do not identify with the brotherhood of stay-at-home fathers and become angry or offended when they are categorized as such. One fathers stated, "I hate the term stay at home father. It sounds condescending. It just means that you are at home while your wife is the bread winner and you're taking care of your kids" (Hiram, age-48, 1 child). Their definition of the role is based on what they see as traditional feminine gender roles that do not apply to them as men. "You are in the kind of traditional wife role" (Hiram, age-48, 1 child). Another of the Resentful fathers shared, “My mom was a stay at home mom and she didn’t work outside of the home at all. She was a home maker....I didn’t consider myself a stay at home dad simply because I have a career.” (Adam, age-38, 4 children) For these fathers their connection to the role is very limited if it exists at all. When asked how they respond to introductions these men often prefer to dodge the question or rely on current or past jobs or find ways to avoid a direct response. This hiding of this part of their life is according to Goffman’s (1967) thoughts on stigma, as a form of “passing.” The individual’s world is divided up by his
social identity and his personal identity where the management of his personal and social identity is contingent on keeping his identities separate. One father laughingly said, “It depends on the setting. It depends on what my schedule looks like that week. If I am doing more ‘soccer mom’ stuff I would say parent” (Adam, age- 38, 4 children). Another shared of his peers, “The only peers that ever knew was when I had to go pick up my son from school. And I know some of the moms would say, why [is he] one of the only dads who’s picking up his kid from school? So I think that they probably knew” (Hiram, age-48 1 child).

The fathers in this grouping struggled internally and externally with the societal attitudes about gender and what it means. Although they may not totally ascribe to the attitudes and ideals about manhood and womanhood held by people of older generations, their perspectives are still influenced by those experiences and attitudes. Wood (2003) in her book on communication, gender, and culture reminds that while a majority of young adults believe women should have equal opportunities and that both parents should be involved in childrearing, however, most people assume the mother not the father should take time off from a career. Likewise, they may also believe that women are as effective as men in management roles, yet they would prefer to have a man as supervisor. Fathers categorized through this typology as Resentful stay-at-home fathers are also struggling with these issues, and deeply ingrained values and beliefs play a part in influencing their more traditional attitudes. “It’s still this voice in your head... just being at home doesn’t feel right, [whispering] you’re not supposed to be doing this. You’re supposed to be out” (Hiram, age-48 1 child).

Family attitudes also play a part in this father’s ability to accept his role:
There’s still that prejudice in my family... My mom worked for a while, but my dad was in the military so whatever he said went. He was the strong father figure you know. He sort of made the rules and everything and that’s kind of how I grew up, so it was hard for me to be the one [at home]. (Hiram, age-48 1 child)

These fathers look for reasons to help them justify their participation in this role while also looking for explanations to assuage the ambivalence they might be feeling toward their new role.

My mom just stayed at home, cleaned house and took care of the kids. And our life is much more complex than that now. . . I had a pretty good life style, you know what I mean? Then I met my husband, and it’s not that we don’t have a good lifestyle. It’s a great lifestyle, but you add kids to that mix and then all of a sudden, you have responsibilities and you have to educate these young people you have to. You become a parent and all of a sudden you have to be up at night wondering if you are the worst parent in the world. (Adam, age-38, 4 children)

One father used his connection to a celebrity stay-at-home father as a model to help him justify his position and negotiate his negative feelings toward being a stay-at-home father.

John Lennon was one of the people that I think actually made it a little bit cooler in my mind that this was something that you could do. He stayed home and took care of his son right. And actually when the Beatles broke up he said, “I’m gonna take a couple of years off and take care of my son” and that’s what he did. And he was the first stay at home dad that I learned of and he kind of broke some of the stereotype. . . People gave him a really hard time for it. [But] that’s what it is all
about right? It was a good example, and I think a lot of people after that said well you know like I said, I think it kind of broke some of the stereotype. So I would think of this and say, John Lennon did this so how bad could it be? (Hiram, age-48 1 child)

While resentful stay-at-home fathers are struggling with their perceptions of the role, they also tend to feel not prepared for the role they have taken on however; they do not look to or rely on others outside of the family for support or assistance. When asked if people knew they were in the stay-at-home father position and how they felt about it fathers openly shared that they kept it hidden. One father shared, “My family was really cool about it. They didn’t say anything, but my friends...a lot of them didn’t know because I sort of cleverly disguised it” (Hiram, age-48 1 child).

When asked how prepared they felt, fathers easily answered that they did not feel prepared, and also shared that they had few if any resources. One father shared that he didn’t have any problem and thought the experience was rewarding, but continued on to finally admit that perhaps he wasn’t that prepared to be the at-home father.

_I didn’t have any problem. For a while I kind of thought it was kind of rewarding, you know cause I got to be with my son. But, I get really bored at home. It’s mind numbingly boring. I don’t know how people would be able to stand it. The T.V. stinks in the daytime, so, and maybe I’m not that prepared to stay home all the time._ (Hiram, age-48 1 child)

Spousal relationships for these fathers were mentioned as points of stress, and several fathers spoke of resentment and tension and not being able to relate when asked how their relationships were affected by them being in the stay-at-home father role.
Statements like the following clearly represent a common perception for these fathers in regard to their relationships whether any spouses actually said anything or not.

I think that although she didn’t ever technically say this it almost seemed like she lost a little bit of respect for me or something. I think she acted differently about it even though she understood what was going on. It wasn’t like I wasn’t doing anything. It was sort of like you’re supposed to be [pause – low voice] working.

(Hiram, age-48 1 child)

Another father shared “You try to relate to your spouse but you can’t relate to them on that level because they don’t even know what your life is like at home so then that causes more conflict and frustration and breakdown in communication and stuff like that” (Adam, age-38, 4 children). And that part of the tension came from the perceived level of flexibility in the others day, the father shared that his spouse “was very, very resentful that I still have the flexibility and he has to get up and be at work at 8’o’clock.” (Adam, age-38, 4 children)

SEX ROLE PERCEPTIONS AND SAHF TYPES

Sandra Bem (1975) in the development of her sex role inventory asserts that during the course of sex role socialization individuals are motivated to maintain a self-image as masculine or feminine and accomplish that by suppressing behaviors that might be considered undesirable or inappropriate based on the individuals sex. Similarly, individuals who hold self-concepts which are “sex-reversed” (Bem, 1975, p. 634), meaning that they present themselves as a more feminine male or a more masculine female maintain a self-image based on their definition of masculine and feminine.
Individuals who because of their self-definition “exclude neither masculinity nor femininity are classified as androgynous and engage in whatever behavior seems most effective regardless of its stereotype as appropriate for one sex or the other” (Bem, 1975, p. 635). The majority of the fathers who completed the inventory for this study scored in the undifferentiated category and crossed all Stay-at-Home father types. (See Table ). 43% of the fathers falling under the reluctant type fall into the undifferentiated category, meaning their rankings on both masculine and feminine scales are below the median and there is no definite connection to either masculine or feminine traits (Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979).

Table 4. Stay-at-Home Father Types and Sex Role Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAHF Type</th>
<th>BEM SEX ROLE CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolutionary SAHF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformer SAHF</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant SAHF</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resentful SAHF</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** N=11 Completed Responses
COPING STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS

These four types of stay-at-home fathers also shared stories and information that supported their daily maintenance of identity and self-concept in relation to their role as stay-at-home fathers. Several common themes appeared throughout the fathers interviews. These themes spoke to how the fathers were able to justify to themselves and others the value and meaning of their role as stay-at-home father. Fathers grouped in categories where the choice to be in the SAHF role was high tended to present stories that supported “Working” from or at home as a “noble gesture,” through which they were able to maintain some level of masculine dominance in their family structure showing that even though they were in what might be considered a more feminine role, their choice enabled their spouse to provide a service to the greater community. Their role in the family was to make things easier for spouse and children, and provide a stable framework. These fathers expressed pride in their role and their “work” at home.

The decision to be the parent at home for some of the fathers in both the categories of Reluctant and Reformer fathers was presented as their choice. These were fathers who valued involvement in family and frequently spoke of their strong desire for family as well as their intentional commitment to the choice. Their role in the family was defined by their responsibility and their desire to be more involved with their children. For a number of the fathers who shared this narrative, they based their interpretation on being the antithesis of their fathers or their experience with fathers. Because the decision to be a stay-at-home father was based on their choice, fathers who presented this type of narrative in justifying or coping with the stigma associated with their role. They focused their efforts on solving a family problem and tended to become more engaged in the role
and more closely associated with the stigmatized group of stay at home fathers versus distancing themselves from the group. A smaller group of father’s expressed their limited choice and financial necessity as justifications precipitating the decision for them to be the parent at home. Of this group, there were also fathers who justified their role by making comparisons to others they could compare themselves to reinforcing positive or negative perceptions. Celebrities who stayed at home represented one type of justification while fathers who were not involved, or were not successful in a stay at home role represented another. While employment or finances may have been at the root of the decision to stay at home their tie to more traditional values and views of fatherhood and masculinity influenced their messages about their role as stay-at-home father. These fathers primarily characterized in the Resentful category, seemed to focus their efforts in justifying their role and coping with the associated stigma and stress by disengaging their self-esteem and identity from threatening domains (Major & O’Brien, 2005).

Through this experience of stay-at-home fatherhood the connection to family and friends as avenues of support were also contingent upon the fathers’ justifications of their role. Relying on support from family and peers was not something that was common, fathers who felt more positively about their role as stay at home father seemed to be more open to accepting assistance, support and guidance from family members, primarily female members of the family - (mother, mother-in law, cousin, and sister). Fathers who were more accepting of the role, and more positive in their approach to being a stay-at-home father were also more open and aware of other resources outside of their families including organizations like the National Stay-at-Home Dad Network (http://athomedad.org/) or local chapters of the organization, online resources like
Slowlane.com and AtHomeDad.com, print resources like the *Stay–at-home Dad Handbook* or publications more geared toward stay at home mothers. These fathers also tried to make use of local community father groups. Interestingly, however, these fathers noted that they may have initially tried to connect with stay-at-home mother groups for playdates or as a source of support, but were often met with resistance, or made to feel uncomfortable in their interpersonal interactions with stay-at-home mothers, or female caretakers thus they elected to limit these involvements and find alternative avenues of support and engagement. This idea is supported by the following examples, shared by fathers:

"It's hard to have friends when you are a stay at home dad. Cause, you don’t make friends. Unlike women who have play groups and other women in the neighborhood they can hang out with during the day, we don’t have that option."

(Carl, age-34, 3 children)

"The moms, they have their own little group. Like when we go to the park or something like that, they’d have their own little group and the dads really weren’t permitted to, to mingle I guess [uncomfortable laugh] they really didn’t really want to have anything to do with [us]. "

(Leon, age- 43, 2 children)
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I discuss the findings of the study, including their implications, limitations of the thesis, and possible directions for further research. In this thesis I gathered data and explored the narratives of stay-at-home fathers in order to gain a better understanding about how these fathers who have taken on primary responsibility for childcare and home management understand and talk about their role, as well how the dominant discourse surrounding stay-at-home fathers influences their self-concepts and negotiation of balance between their gender, identity, and work-family roles.

This study with 14 stay-at-home fathers provided some grounded findings about this growing demographic of men who are responsible for the primary care of their children and households on a full time basis. Due to the limited number of fathers interviewed, conclusions can only be tentatively drawn and while the sample of fathers did include a range of ages, ethnicities and geographic locations, conclusions cannot be generalized to the population of all stay-at-home fathers. Yet, the detailed assessments argue that the concept of stay-at-home father is not monolithic and that at least four different types of stay-at-home fathers can be discerned.

In comparison to some of the other studies seeking to better understand the experience of stay-at-home fathers (e.g., Harrington, 2012; Latshaw, 2009), this study also discovered that choice is an important factor and how each father manages and engages his experience at home is dependent on not only pragmatic and value-driven reasons, but the conscious commitment to take on the responsibility of children and
home. This has important implications for future communication research of stay-at-home fathers as well as fathers in general.

How fathers identify with the role of stay-at-home father and their approach to managing care of children and home may have a direct impact on how their children are socialized and develop in terms of expectations, and understandings about gender roles and work-family roles. Having fathers willingly and actively involved at home also provides for more depth and dimension in regard to our societal view of masculinity and fatherhood. Traditional models of fatherhood are focused on representing “father” as breadwinner, hero, and protector. The behaviors and attitudes attributed to what is considered masculine and feminine are important in constructing perceptions and ideologies about what it means to be a father, and how that may or may not differ from what it means to be a stay-at-home father.

Recognizing that family and parental socialization are important factors in how individuals learn about the world of work, and its interconnection with family, the messages children receive provide a framework for sense making around these areas and provide a means for future interpretation of gendered understandings of work, and family relationships and roles.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

This study demonstrated that all stay-at-home fathers do not fit one particular type or model, nor is there one type of person who is more likely to make the choice to become a stay-at-home father. Men from varying backgrounds with the support of their partners make the choice to be stay-at-home fathers and actively engage and participate
in successfully managing in their role. Their success and confidence in part is dependent on how they approach the experience and the foundation upon which they build their understanding and acceptance of the role. Fathers who ascribe to more traditional ideologies of fatherhood and masculinity may seem to have a more difficult time adjusting to the more feminized role and although they may see what they are doing as a benefit to the family, they experience anger, resentment and frustration in carrying out the day to day responsibilities of a father at home. The major findings of this study address (a) four types of stay-at-home-fathers, (b) coping strategies and narratives these fathers use to justify, and manage stigma associated with their SAHF role, and (c) consequences and challenges of resulting from time in the role of primary caretaker.

**Stay-at-Home Father Types**

Findings indicated that although the men identified as stay-at-home fathers have been seen as a homogeneous group there are in fact distinct differences not only in their experiences, but in the way that they identify with the role, and how they communicate to others about being a stay-at-home father. The results of this study support an argument for a new grounded, stay-at-home father typology arrayed along a continuum of the level of acceptance of their role in respect to the amount of perceived choice as well as the accompanying degree of identification and participation in the role dependent on their level of integration of traditional models of parenting and fatherhood. The data suggests four types of stay-at-home fathers, the Revolutionary, Reformer, Reluctant, and Resentful. These classifications derived from the data collected through this study represent a broad based examination of patterns and representations of fathers.
Viewing the types of fathers identified along a continuum of perceived degree of choice, with the Revolutionary type being on one extreme and the Resentful type being on the other, it appears that fathers for a variety of reasons, including, time in the experience, change in reasons for remaining, as well as changes in family circumstances may shift in their orientation along the continuum. Fathers who type as Reluctant may through time and experience become more imbedded in the role and begin to incorporate the stay-at-home father role into their personal identity. A number of the fathers who have been in the role for more than two years, shared examples that support this assumption. Their initial reactions and comfort levels associated with being at home changed over time as they recognized their ability to manage home and child care on a full time basis, and received positive reinforcements from spouses, children, peers, and others outside of their immediate family. Pride in their accomplishments, a willingness to share information with other fathers at home, or fathers considering it as an option and their ability to incorporate more of their “masculine” identity into the role are characteristics that separate revolutionary and reformer SAHF's from the other groupings. It is also evident that fathers along this continuum can move into the more Resentful category from a place of Reluctance and uncertainty, particularly those fathers who are in some regards forced to continue in the role and feel that they are not receiving adequate support or recognition for the service to the family they are providing.

How fathers at home approach their role and the attitudes they have about being the father at home directly influence how the children they are caring for will internalize messages about work, and family roles. Fathers who are positive about their experience and accept their stay-at-home father role as “just the way our family works” provide a
much different foundation than fathers who are resistant to the role and feel resentment and sometimes even anger toward themselves, their spouses, and/or their children at being forced to be in the caregiving role instead of a more traditional masculine role outside of the home.

Data from this study, although limited in scope supports the assumption that social practices and norms of fatherhood and parenting although generally conceptualized within a contemporary framework are open to redefinition and change based on changes in family functioning and the changing practices of men in the twentieth century that are linked to the idea of new masculinities within families.

Coping Strategies and Narratives

Doucet (2004) talks about stay-at-home fathers creating new masculinities by incorporating aspects of femininity into their identity, examples of this include fathers becoming more affectionate, emotional and nurturing. The results from the small sample of fathers who completed the Bem Sex Role inventory are in some respects inconclusive. Of the eleven fathers who completed and returned the inventory six of the eleven (55%) fell into to the undifferentiated category, meaning that their scores on both the masculinity and femininity scales fell below the norm. This pattern seems to be supportive of Doucet’s train of thought and indicates that fathers at home are beginning to integrate and incorporate more aspects considered feminine into their identities. By integrating characteristics considered more feminine, these fathers are developing a new sense of who they are and are able to use that discovery to help them construct roles and identities as stay-at-home fathers that balance traditional messages about work choice, the priority of family, life planning and financial need (Medved, et. al, 2009).
Fathers who stay at home create narratives to help them better justify their position, and construct their identities as fathers in such a way that they (a) maintain their position within the family, (b) use identity to help negotiate relationships and (c) maintain their identity as a “good father” (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2007). The level of complexity of their story is influenced in part by their perceived level of choice and the degree to which they have integrated the role into their self-concept. Fathers who expressed a stronger desire to remain far removed from the stigma associated with the role and perceived less choice in the decision tended to create supporting narratives that helped them more fully justify their involvement in the role of stay-at-home father. Fathers who perceived more choice tended to use narratives that highlighted more positive or rewarding aspects of the role such as pride, value and commitment to family, recognition, and acceptance of their ability to provide nurturing and support within their family dynamic. They focused on the value of their decision within the family structure, and the benefit their being at home afforded their spouse and children. Fathers who tended to be more ambivalent about their role, Reluctant fathers, shared narratives of justification that focused more on specific, and concrete reasoning for the decision regarding their being the parent at home. Financial or logistical reasons were the most prevalent themes and focused on the spouse having a greater earning potential, higher level of education or position, or less flexibility within the work environment. The few fathers who based on their responses were typed as Resentful and several of the fathers in the Reluctant type who tended toward Resentful SAHFs, spoke of their role in terms of filling a gap and anticipated being in the role for only a short time. These fathers seemed to be not as fully engaged in the role anticipating the time when their service to family through
responsibilities at home would end and they could return to a more traditional work role. For these fathers there seemed to be tensions related to work/life conflicts and the negotiation of components of their identity connected to constructs of fatherhood and masculinity as they juggle divergent feelings around old and new practices of fathering, and old and new ideas of what is considered masculine.

Regardless of their placement along the continuum, many of the fathers in a more full-time, traditional stay at home role experience an absence of connection to their professional lives prior to becoming a SAHF. For fathers working part-time from home or outside of the home while also balancing full-time care of children and home, many expressed their struggle with being able to openly share both aspects of their life. For most of these fathers at home there is a lack of connection to or awareness of positive male role models in stay-at-home father roles to help them in developing coping strategies and identifying additional supports for navigating the dynamics of this feminized, stigmatized role as stay-at-home father.

Consequences and Challenges

Examining the role of stay-at-home fathers and non-traditional gender identities is important for us to be better able to affect social change, in order to transform societal biases and language choices for discussing the role of fatherhood and masculinity in a more inclusive way. Fathers who stay at home and remain connected to the workplace seem to have less concern about returning to work regardless of the amount of time they spend at home. Fathers who are less connected to the workplace, and have been in the primary caregiver role for longer periods of time, seem to experience more concern about their eventual return to work. Men falling under the typology category of Reluctant-stay-
at-home father seem to have been in the SAHF role longer periods of time yet have not
invested much time or energy into maintaining workplace skills or connections and fear
the prospect of returning to the workplace. The perceived stigma associated with their
choice to provide family support by exiting with workforce and focusing on family
supports findings of other studies that identify categories of fathers and based on their
focus toward family (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009). Failure to examine, and perhaps
challenge common narratives and popular discourse surrounding stay-at-home fathers
perpetuates a mentality that hinders the development of non-gendered policies that affect
individuals in the workplace, in our communities, and in our families.

Fathers who have spent a significant amount of time in the SAHF role without a
continued connection to the workforce reported a loss in confidence related to their
abilities as workers, and have a difficult time communicating the value of what they are
doing at home to more professional situations. Carl, a 34 year old father of three who has
been a stay-at-home father for ten years summed up one of the common fears, lack of
confidence, associated with reintegration to the workplace by saying, “As a SAHD I
wasn’t confident that I had been doing anything of worth. I mean, I knew in my heart; I
see it in my kids that I was working very hard with them and I could see it in their eyes,
but these people that I’m working with they’ve been professional psychologists and
counselors for years, so it was really hard for me to stand shoulder to shoulder with these
guys.”

Fathers considering returning to work full time or working part time hours while
providing care for children and home were intent on being able to determine their own
lifestyles and maintaining a flexible schedule that allowed for their continued high level
of involvement in the lives of their children. How fathers frame their experience and communicate to potential employers their skills and experiences is as important as their ability to demonstrate confidence in the identity they have created for themselves as fathers. By studying stay-at-home fathers, we can gain a better understanding of some of the communication issues and challenges stay-at-home fathers face and perhaps identify ways to better assist them in reintegrating to the workforce once their children are not their primary focus, and better support their efforts at home.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Implications for future research in the field of communication based on the findings of this study point to further exploration of the impact messages fathers at home and fathers in general share with their children. As a new image of fatherhood, influenced by social and cultural changes is emerging and the role that fathers play in the lives of their children is becoming more appreciated, how fathers define their identity, and represent themselves in relation to both work and family is an area that should continue to be explored. Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) argue that while what it means to be a father traditionally addressed by suggesting that fatherhood is linked to a set of responsibilities ranging from providing economic support, discipline and role modeling appropriate gender based behavior social and cultural changes have brought question to these ideals. Their conclusion is that while being a father has implications for children, fatherhood also changes men’s lives. This study on stay-at-home fathers opens an avenue of investigation into how children, parents and families are affected and influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of parents at home.
If identifying that men in the stay-at-home father role do not fit one particular type or model, and there are degrees of differentiation along a continuum, with no one, type of person being representative, it stands that on a broader scale, this typing might also apply to mothers who are in the at-home parent role. The blurring of spousal roles and the balance of power and work within families is also an implication not directly addressed in the results of this study, but alluded to in the conversations with the fathers interviewed. Who has responsibility for childcare when the working spouse is at home, and how do spouses equitably distribute the work that is traditional considered “men’s work” if he is already doing “women’s work”?

Viewing family as the first organization individuals are introduced to, this study could also provide a platform for looking at some of these same typing categories and characteristics in relation to work groups and teams, particularly as the intersections, outcomes and interplay of work and family life domains have implications for individuals, families and organizations (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2007).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this final section, additional directions for future research are discussed in relation to some of the limitations of this study. First, while this study represents findings about the experience of stay-at-home fathers, the sample size of fathers is small, and although the fathers represent a diversity of age, ethnic, academic, economic, and geographic backgrounds, as well as fathers who had been at home and who are currently at home, future studies would benefit from an expanded sample size. Expanding the sample size by including younger fathers, ages 18-30, more fathers who represent other
areas of diversity including LGBTQ, ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds as well as more of a diversity of family structure is important to make sure that initial findings from this study are validated across a larger population. It should also be noted that the sample of fathers included in this study were a self-selected group who in some way identified with the label stay-at-home father. The recruitment process required fathers to make the decision about what a stay-at-home father was and then elect to participate in the study. It may have been more advantageous to have recruited fathers who identified as primary caregiver versus stay-at-home father and focus the research more broadly on male primary caregivers for future studies. The definition of stay at home father in this study was also broadly based and included fathers who worked from home or outside of the home with fathers who did not work at all. Future research could more clearly define the population desired, and assess the group based on fathers who are currently at home and fathers who have been in the role in the past. This division would also allow for comparisons of experiences across time.

Second, while data collected focused on fathers and their experiences the typologies developed may be further reaching and provide a framework for evaluating not only fathers at home, but mothers who are in a stay-at-home role as well. A number of the fathers interviewed shared information about how the experience of being a stay-at-home father affected familial relationships, and expectations about gendered thoughts about work and family roles for spouses and children. While family as an organization and the socialization and communication processes therein play an important role in the development of understandings of work, family and gender attitudes (Medved, et al, 2009), given the impact on relationships and socialization, valuable data may be gained
by including spouses and children of stay-at-home fathers in the study. Other areas not
directly addressed, but existing in this study, which provide additional questions to be
explored include a more in depth exploration of racial diversity, blended and step families
and same sex partner families and the stay-at home father experience.

Thirdly, future research should include work to verify the validity of the
typologies and narratives identified across a wider sample of fathers. More focus on
cultural differences of stay at home fathers as well as exploration into the attitudes about
family, work and work-life balance in regard to stay-at-home father experiences across
generations.

A final implication to consider for future research is to consider the sex of the
interviewer as something that might alter the input of the male caregivers in discussing
their thoughts and feelings about self-concept, identity and work and family roles.

CONCLUSIONS

The idea of choice and the response to the stigmatized role of stay-at-home father
are embedded in the conversations of the fathers in this study. I argue that some of the
underlying gendered assumptions about work and family roles influenced by traditional
expectations that “good mothers” stay at home and nurture and “good fathers” work hard
to provide for their family’s financial future are being challenged by fathers who make
the choice to re-examine their work and career goals and find meaningful and fulfilling
work outside of the traditional workplace. Many of these fathers have been able to
successfully navigating conflicting messages from family history, and popular culture
that, caretaking is an innate, biological phenomenon, constructed to be a “feminine skill.”
Men in the caregiving role have been reduced to a set of common characteristics, distorted by the implication that all members of a particular sex are alike and lack the ability to be nurturing and successfully manage care of children and home.

Changes in the American family and generalizations about men, masculinity, fatherhood, and their roles within families are behind the change in the visibility and consistency of the message that the American father isn’t who he used to be, and issues a challenge to our views of gender roles and fatherhood, as well as our understanding of the fathers’ role as caregiver and the impact of these changes on fathers in the workplace and at home. This provides merit for further study of the conceptual foundations of the concept of stay-at-home father and its surrounding discourses and implications for parents and families in general.
REFERENCES


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Androgyny Measures." *Sex Roles* (7)217.


APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT NOTIFICATION FORM

Work Across the Generations: Communication Narratives of Stay-at-home fathers

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a study on the communication challenges of Stay-at-home fathers (SAHF). This research is being conducted by Master's student Alice Jones, for my MA thesis with Dr. Tom Socha of the Communication Department of Old Dominion University as my advisor. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose not to talk to me at all or you can refuse to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable with. However, I do hope you will help me by answering as truthfully and completely as you can. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no and withdraw from the study while we are talking. This interview confidential I will not ask for information that would identify you. Your information will be kept confidential. I will use pseudonyms when reporting results. The results of this study will be presented in my thesis at ODU, as well as in future papers at professional conferences, and/or might be published in a journal.

The purpose of this form is to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research.

RESEARCHERS

Investigator: Alice L. Jones, Masters Candidate, College of Arts & Letters, Communication Department, (aljones@odu.edu), 757-893-0323

Advisor: Thomas Socha, Professor and Graduate Program Director, PhD, College of Arts & Letters, Communication Department (tsocha@odu.edu), 757-683-3833

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this interview study is to better understand communication of Stay-at-home fathers (SAHF) and how they use communication to manage everyday life.

If you decide to participate, then you will be interviewed for approximately 1 hour or less, and asked to complete a questionnaire prior to the interview. Interviews will be conducted at various sites of convenience in Norfolk and ODU (ie: Campus coffee shops, public libraries, or other areas conveniently located).
PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS

To participate in this study, you must be: (1) at least 18 years old, (2) a father with at least one child for whom you are or have been primary caretaker (3) primary employment is not outside of the home.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

RISKS: There are no risks of participation. Your response and the recorded interviews will be kept confidential and after the analysis is completed will be destroyed.

BENEFITS: The main benefits to you for participating in this study are the receipt of a $5 gift card for coffee/tea at the time of the interview to compensate your time and participation and acknowledge your contributions to the understanding of fatherhood, as well as the knowledge that your responses will contribute to the body of knowledge about stay-at-home father’s.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publications, but the researcher will not identify you.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is OK for you to say NO. And, even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By agreeing to participate in the study and responding to questions, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Please contact the primary researcher, Alice Jones at 757-683-4034 or by email at aljones@odu.edu. You can also contact the project supervisor, Dr. Thomas Socha, in the Department of Communication at 757-683-3833, or by email at tsocha@odu.edu.
INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this participant the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the participant's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant Identification: ____________

A. GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Age

2. Ethnicity
   - White/Caucasian
   - Black/African American
   - Hispanic/Latino
   - Asian/Asian American
   - Native American/ American Indian
   - Other

3. Do you work outside the home?

4. How many hours?

5. How many hours does your spouse/partner work outside of the home?

6. What is your household income?
   - Less than $20,000
   - $20,000 - $30,000
   - $30,000 - $40,000
   - $40,000- $50,000
   - $50,000 – $60,000
   - $60,000 - $70,000
7. Highest level of education completed?
   - Less than high school
   - High School Diploma/GED
   - Some College
   - Associates Degree
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Some Graduate School
   - Graduate Degree (Masters, PhD, JD, MD, etc.)

8. Highest level of education completed by your spouse/partner?
   - Less than high school
   - High School Diploma/GED
   - Some College
   - Associates Degree
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Some Graduate School
   - Graduate Degree (Masters, PhD, JD, MD, etc.)

B. ROLE DEFINITION

1. How many children do you care for and what are their ages?

2. What does the term “Stay-at-home father” mean to you?
3. How did you become a stay-at-home father?

4. When you meet people and are introduced how do you respond to the question, “What do you do?”

5. How prepared do you feel to be successful in your role as a stay-at-home father?

6. What do you feel prepared for this role as a stay-at-home father?
   a. If you don’t feel prepared what would help you feel more prepared?

C. SELF CONCEPT

7. Have you seen any of the popular movies/television/cable shows featuring stay-at-home fathers?
   a. If so, how do you feel about how those fathers are represented?

8. What are some of the challenges you face as a stay at home father?

9. Had you heard of fathers who stayed at home when you were growing up or before you became a stay-at-home father?

10. How are your relationships affected by your role as a stay at home father
    a. Spouse
    b. Male Children
    c. Female Children
    d. Other family members
    e. Peers

D. PARENTING AND WORK

11. Describe a typical day for you.
12. Do you have conversations with your children about work? What do those conversations sound like?
   a. What comments have your children made about your stay-at-home father/Career–mother family structure?

13. Do you think your role as a stay-at-home father will influence how your children think about work?

14. How might your non-traditional role influence their decisions, choices and understandings about work?

15. How might your role as stay-at-home father influence their understandings about gender roles and family roles?

E. NEGOTIATING BALANCE

16. What are some of the benefits for you as a stay-at-home father? What are some of the drawbacks of this role?

17. How long do you plan to stay in this role? Or how long have you been in this role? What are your fears about returning to the workforce?

18. Is there any additional information about your role as a stay-at-home father that you would like to share with me that you think would help me with my research?
APPENDIX C
BEM SEX-ROLE INVENTORY

The following items are from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. Rate yourself on each item, on a scale from: 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true)

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http://faculty.sunyduchess.edu/andrews/bem_sex.htm
To whom it may concern:

My name is Alice Jones. I am a graduate student at Old Dominion University working on my Master’s degree in Lifespan Communication and Digital Media. I am conducting a research study for my thesis with the help of my advisor, Dr. Thomas Socha.

I am interested studying the communication of Stay-at-home fathers (SAHF). I want to hear the stories of stay-at-home fathers to better understand how men in different life stages talk about and view their roles as stay at home fathers as well as their ideas of work and everyday family life.

This research study was reviewed and approved by the College of Arts and Letters Human Subjects Research Review Committee at Old Dominion University, and found to adequately safeguard participants’ privacy, welfare, civil liberties and rights. All information collected from participants will be kept confidential and no personally identifying information will be used.

I am hoping that you would be able to assist me by posting a link to your website that stay-at-home fathers who might be willing to participate in the study can use to provide me general information so that I can contact them to follow up with a personal interview. I anticipate that the questionnaire would take less than 10 minutes to complete and the follow up interview would last approximately 60 minutes. Participants who volunteer to be interviewed will be provided with a $5 gift card for coffee at the time of the interview. The following link will allow interested fathers to share their information with me. https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JML7V2T or you can copy and paste the HTML code below to add my Web Link to any webpage:

<a href="https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JML7V2T">Click here to take survey</a>

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Thank you in advance for your time and support.

Alice L. Jones

MA Candidate
Old Dominion University
ajone150@odu.edu
APPENDIX E
MARKETING FLYER

FATHERS NEEDED!
Are you:

✔ 18 or older?
✔ A father?
✔ The primary caretaker of at least one child?
✔ Not employed outside of the home

If you answered yes to the questions above I am interested in talking to you about your experiences. I am working on my Master’s thesis in Lifespan Communication and Digital Media at Old Dominion University related to Stay-At-Home Fathers.

If you are interested in assisting me with my thesis project related to Stay-At-Home Fathers, please contact me, Alice Jones by email at aljones@odu.edu or respond to the survey https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JML7V2T
### APPENDIX F

**PARTICIPANT SUMMARY**

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<th>Stay-at-Home Father</th>
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VITA

Alice L. Jones
Old Dominion University
5115 Hampton Boulevard
Norfolk, VA 23529

Education and Training

M.A.
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA
Lifespan Communication and Digital Media
Advisor: Dr. Thomas Socha

Virginia Tidewater Consortium, Norfolk, VA
Certificate, College Teaching
Fall, 2008

College of New Rochelle, New Rochelle, NY
Certificate, Career Development
May, 1990

M.S.
Miami University, Oxford, OH
Educational Leadership,
Advisor: Dr. Barbara Bradley Stonewater
May, 1986

B.S.
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA
Mathematics Education
August, 1984

Selected Presentations

Jones, A. (March 2014). Communication, “work” and the lifespan: Effects on career
decision-making. Poster Session at Graduate Research Day at Old Dominion
University.

Guler, E. & Jones, A. (March 2013). Integrating Career Development. Presented at the
34th Annual Spring Conference on the Teaching of Writing at Old Dominion
University.

Professional Associations

National Communication Association (NCA)
Reviewer, NCA 2014 Conference: Student Section (2014)

Southern Association of Colleges and Employers (SoACE)

Liberal Arts Commission Reader (2008)