

# THE NEW DAD

EXPLORING FATHERHOOD WITHIN A CAREER CONTEXT

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*The authors would like to dedicate this study to our fathers:  
Ed Harrington, Herb Van Deusen, and Stu Shapiro,  
who were each great role models of what it means  
to be a good father.*

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# INTRODUCTION

*It is rarely easy. There are plenty of days of struggle and heartache when, despite our best efforts, we fail to live up to our responsibilities. I know I have been an imperfect father. I know I have made mistakes. I have lost count of all the times, over the years, when the demands of work have taken me from the duties of fatherhood. There were many days out on the campaign trail when I felt like my family was a million miles away, and I knew I was missing moments of my daughters' lives that I'd never get back. It is a loss I will never fully accept.*

*On this Father's Day, I am recommitting myself to that work, to those duties that all parents share: to build a foundation for our children's dreams, to give them the love and support they need to fulfill them, and to stick with them the whole way through, no matter what doubts we may feel or difficulties we may face. That is my prayer for all of us on this Father's Day, and that is my hope for this nation in the months and years ahead.*

— PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, JUNE 21, 2009

Today in homes all over America, from the White House in Washington, DC, to an apartment in Los Angeles, from a tidy Colonial in New England to a sprawling contemporary home in the Midwest, men are launching a quiet revolution. Spawned by the women's movement, changing demographics in higher education, and a brutal recession, men are no longer the primary breadwinners of days gone by. It is easy to construct a story of loss that has led to what one recent report called *A Woman's Nation*.

While this quiet revolution does have seeds in the shifting and uncertain economic fate of men, it is equally born of a new spirit and determination among men to achieve the status of a "whole person." While women have fought for the past thirty years for legitimacy in the workplace, now it is men's turn to find their place not just at work but in the home.

Like women, men will not always find this journey easy. In spite of the gains their spouses have made in the workplace, it is still assumed that women will play the primary role of raising the children. While gender inequity has adversely affected women in many ways (from lower pay to lower expectations to the glass ceiling), it has also made it difficult for men to be recognized as equal contributors as parents.

Through this study, we have attempted to view and understand, through their eyes, the experience of today's working fathers in their roles both as worker and parent. We are interested in the career identity and the paternal identity of these new fathers and how the two roles integrate, conflict, and enrich one another. We hope that our conversations with these 33 men will provide a look inside what it means to be a new father and in so doing, give us all a richer understanding of men's struggles and joy as they embrace their roles as breadwinner and caregiver.

# WHY THIS STUDY IS IMPORTANT NOW

Today, fatherhood has taken on many new dimensions. Fathers are met with greater expectations regarding their role not just as breadwinners, but often as full partners in co-parenting. We feel that now is the time for a significant, substantive, and fresh look at the role of fathers today, and the important, complex and changing role they play in the modern American family.

There are a number of factors that have influenced the current ideologies of good fathering. These include the rise in women's professional and educational status and the corresponding increase in the importance of their earnings, the enormous number of dual career couples and single parent head of households, changing career patterns and shifts in generational values.

## The Other Gender: In Education and in the Workplace

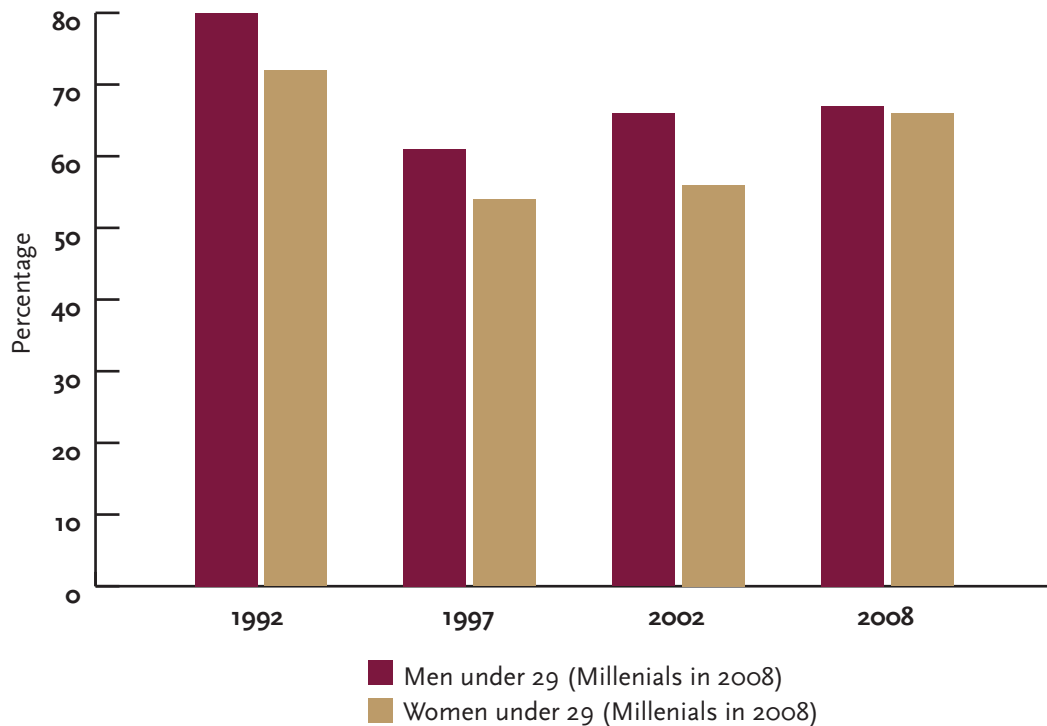
The most compelling reason for exploring the issue of men and fatherhood at this time is perhaps ironically, women. Women make up the "other half" of parents in most two-parent families (obviously not in the case of same sex couples), and the dynamics of what's happening with women in the workplace has a tremendous bearing on what men need to do from a parenting perspective.

Over the past three decades, women have experienced tremendous success in the classroom and in corporations and nowhere is this progress more evident than in higher education. In the United States today, women now earn 62% of the associate's degrees, 57% of the bachelor's degrees, and 60% of the master's degrees awarded each year. In addition, approximately 50% of professional degrees and nearly 50% of PhD's are now given to women. This compares to 1970, when women earned fewer than 10% of professional degrees & PhD's in the United States (Mason, 2009). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, at age 22, 185 women have graduated from college for every 100 men who have done so (Brooks, 2010)

Today, for the first time, women make up 50% of the US workforce. This is due in part to the highly unequal impact of the recession of 2008-2010 on men, who lost more than 70% of the 8 million total jobs lost in the US. This disparity is also due in great measure to the industries that have been most affected by the recession – housing and construction, automotive, manufacturing and financial services, which are typically male-dominated industries. By contrast, service industries and education, sectors where women have a stronger presence, were less adversely impacted by the recession. As we look to the future, of the 15 jobs projected to have the greatest growth rate in next decade, 12 are dominated by women (Boushey, 2009.)

Finally, according to the National Study of the Changing Workforce, for the first time since 1992, young women and young men do not differ in terms of their desire for jobs with greater responsibility (Galinsky, Aumann, Kerstin, & Bond, 2008) (see Figure 1). As a result, young women will likely be less prone to be the "accommodating spouse" in two-career couples, placing their career aspirations second to that of their male spouse. Historically, young women, cognizant of both the professional obstacles they faced as well as needs and expectations related to childbearing and child rearing, were less likely to seek jobs with greater responsibility than their male counterparts. Today for the first time in recent history, it appears that this is no longer the case.

**Figure 1: Young Women's/Men's Desire for Jobs with More Responsibility (1992-2008)**



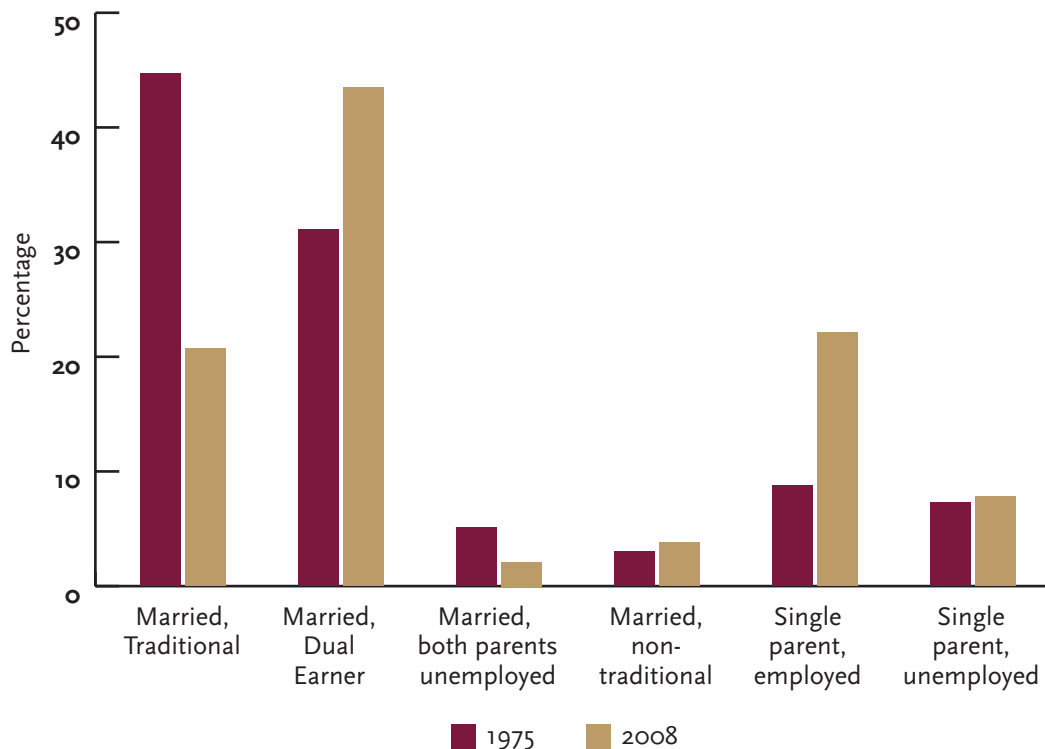
Galinsky, E, Aumann, K, & Bond, J. (2008). The national study of the changing workforce 2008: Times are changing: Gender and generation at work and at home. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.

As we will discuss in the next section, the combination of all of these factors (educational attainment, growth in job demand, and desire for greater responsibility) will result in couples making very different economic decisions than in the past.

### Changing Family Structures and Dual-Career Couples

As Figure 2 indicates, the changes in family structure in the United States over the past 35 years have been profound. While we see a dramatic increase in a number of types of families, the greatest change has been the drastic decrease in the “traditional family” consisting of two parents where one worked and the other stayed at home to care for the children and perform domestic tasks (typically the woman). Today, the number of “traditional families” has slipped from more than 45% in 1975, to just over 20%. This traditional family structure has been replaced mainly by dual-career couples and single parent heads-of-household where the single parent is employed.

**Figure 2: Changes in Family Structure and Work, Families with Children Under 18, 1975 & 2008**



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release: Table 4, Families with own children: Employment status of parents by age of youngest child and family type, 2007-2008 annual averages; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Indicator 18: Parent's Employment. Employment status of parents with own children under 18 years old, by type of family, 1975 to 1993.

In the United States, in more than 70% of two parent households with children, both parents are working outside the home (US Census Bureau, 2008). We have reached a point where in most families, there is no longer a stay-at-home parent focused on child rearing and management of the household. Obviously, this major set of activities did not simply disappear, the result being that the responsibilities of all working people have increased. The natural conclusion is that men have needed to perform more of these duties.

While historically, this “dual agenda” of work and family has fallen more to the female spouse creating what has been famously termed the “second shift” (Hochschild, 1989, 2003) we believe this is changing for a number of reasons. Today, in 24% of dual-career couples, the woman earns more than her male spouse (Raley, Mattingly & Bianchi, 2006). While there are many reasons (such as entrenched gender roles) that women have continued to take greater responsibility for child rearing, this shift toward more balanced earnings is having a profound impact on the division and balance of home and workforce labor. In addition, nearly 28% of all US households today are led by a single parent, who, even more acutely than dual-income couples, feels the intense pressure of trying to balance work and non-work commitments without the aid of a stay-at-home partner.

### Changing Career Patterns

In addition to the rise in dual-career couples, the change in career patterns has also had an impact on fathers' career ideals. Beginning in the late 1980's, a dramatic shift occurred in the relationship



between careers and employers. As employers' downsizing efforts reached record levels in the 1990s and early 2000s (Uchitelle, 2006), employees realized that the employment contract from previous generations had come to an end. Today, instead of seeing a career as associated with a particular organization, individuals are more likely to identify with their profession or simply themselves (i.e. see themselves as being "self-employed"). This has led to a more self-directed approach to career management for many individuals which has been termed the Protean Career (Hall, 2001) or the Boundaryless Career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996)

This shift to a career model that is increasingly independent of organization heralds the end of the "Organization Man," a stereotyped view from the 1956 book by William H. Whyte. In this highly influential work whose prototype of working men seemed to have great staying power, Whyte described these men as, *"the ones of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vow of organization life, and it is they who are the heart and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions."* (Whyte, 1956)

This shift raises a number of questions. For example, does a more self-directed career lead to differing views of success where subjective measures (meaningful work, ability to lead a healthy lifestyle, time to make a meaningful commitment to family and parenting) become more important than objective measures such as position on the hierarchy or job title? If this is the case, might we find men who strive for "careers of achievement" in terms of skills and behavior, rather than "careers of advancement" in terms of a person's hierarchical progression (Zabusky & Barley, 1996)? Most career studies do not allow the participants to articulate their views on and assessment of success from their own perspective. (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005.) We feel it is critical that we better understand what men, and specifically fathers, believe it means to have a successful and fulfilling career and life in these changing times.

### Changing Generational Values

Further complicating the dynamics of today's workforce, generational value differences seem to also influence career ideals. There is much evidence to suggest that younger generations in the workplace (referred to as Generation Y or Millennials) do not share the career attitudes of the baby boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964.) In many studies, younger workers have placed a greater emphasis on autonomy and work-life balance than is the case with previous generations (Hewlett, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2009). One hypothesis is that the affluence that the youngest working generation has experienced has led to a greater emphasis on and concern for quality of life issues, as opposed to simply focusing on earnings and promotional opportunities as the most important determinants of success.

In addition to the changing values of this generation, it also appears that the younger generation is re-thinking and re-defining traditional gender based roles. In her recently released *The Unfinished Revolution: How a Generation is Reshaping Family, Work, and Gender in America* (2009), NYU Sociologist Kathleen Gerson summarizes a study she has done on Millennials and concluded that:

*"Regardless of their own family experiences, today's young women and men 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. Now making the transition to adulthood, they have no well-worn 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 children should be raised."*

*Most men no longer assume they can or will want to support a family on their own, 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.”*

## Changing Role of Men

All of these changes in demographics, values, and career prototypes point toward a changing role for working fathers in our society. In essence, contemporary fatherhood ideals are in many respects similar to what maternal ideals and expectations were 30 years ago but with the opposite challenge. Women have always had legitimacy in the home and yet faced a significant struggle to enjoy the same level of credibility and acceptance in the workplace. The impact of the “women’s movement” has been largely successful in increasing women’s impact in the workplace as has already been evidenced by many of the statistics highlighted earlier.

Conversely, men’s place in the world of work has been clear, to the extent that the terms *father* and *breadwinner* were seen as virtually synonymous. But the degree to which men have the same level of legitimacy at home and in child rearing is not so clear. In the United States today, when one spouse stays at home to care for children, 97% of the time, that spouse is the wife (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The low number of stay-at-home fathers suggests that for a whole host of reasons, men’s role as father, nurturer, and caregiver is still not fully embraced in our society nor by the vast majority of

employers. Fathers struggling to balance career aspirations with a focus on parenting, thereby finding legitimacy in both work and home spheres, may encounter “paternal walls” not unlike the maternal walls working mothers have faced.

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*My father gave me the  
greatest gift anyone could  
give another person:  
he believed in me.*

JIM VALVANO,  
BASKETBALL COACH

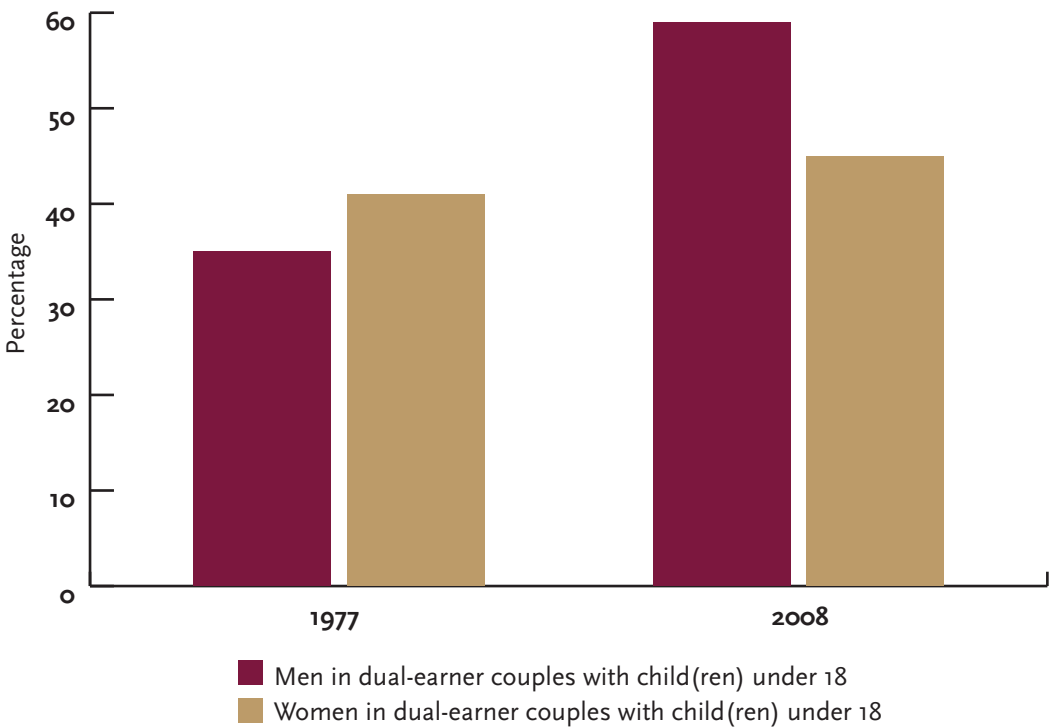
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In many ways, the struggle to legitimize being a family-focused worker is more difficult for men. While organizations may have policies in place to assist parents of both genders, a true family friendly culture that supports their use, especially by fathers, often lags behind. The new fatherhood imperative, that requires greater work flexibility for dads to take charge or at least equally share in childrearing and household responsibilities, faces challenges with the reward systems and organizational cultures that have

not changed to reflect these new ideals. Ideal work norms still reward on the basis of competition and loyalty where long work hours show commitment to an organization (Williams, 2001). Men who challenge such norms may be even more open to critique than their female counterparts.

Recent research results from the National Study of the Changing Workforce also provides surprising evidence that fathers in dual-earner couples feel significantly greater work-life conflict than mothers and that this level of conflict is rising steadily and relatively rapidly.

Table 2: Dual-Earner Couple Work-Life Conflict for Men and Women in 1977 and in 2008.



Galinsky, E, Aumann, K, & Bond, J. (2008). The national study of the changing workforce 2008: Times are changing: Gender and generation at work and at home. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.

This significant increase in work-life conflict for men in dual-earner couples lends credence that this is a good time to study the role of fathers. Perhaps the comments of one of our study participants best summarizes the underlying reason for the stress men feel; that the roles fathers play at home are still underappreciated in the workplace.

*“I was just thinking about work and the role and how I’m viewed by people at work. And I think the one thing that’s been somewhat frustrating to me is appreciation for my contributions in my role [as a father]. Let’s say for example a peer of mine who’s a woman who has a child of a similar age, there’s more empathy, more understanding, more wow, you’re really doing a lot. ... I think there’s an assumption that when I go home I’m not doing as much. And, I have more time to focus on things like work. And, there’s just a natural inclination to believe that my wife does the bulk of the work. It’s not a prejudice ... it’s nothing negative or anything nasty. But, I certainly am aware of it. And, it’s something that is frustrating. I make such a commitment to my family and being there for them.” [Tom, VP of Leadership Development]*

# THE RESEARCH PROCESS

With the backdrop of all of these changing values, expectations and behaviors, this study was designed to better understand how today's men view their role as fathers and the impact this has on their career intentions, aspirations, attitudes and behaviors. The focus on new fathers was intended to be complementary to a study of new mothers done by Professor Jamie Ladge in 2008 entitled *Becoming a Working Mother: Identity, Efficacy and re-socialization following re-entry*. We initially used the following criteria for the participants:

- Recent first-time father with a child aged 3 months to 18 months
- College educated
- At least 5 years of professional work experience
- Married

Participants were selected using snowball sample techniques. We emailed part-time MBA students from class lists at a large East Coast University. Participants included students from the class or colleagues or friends of classmates. Each of the men was interviewed by one of the primary research investigators. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) was established prior to the start of the interviews to guide the discussion. Thus, the interviews were semi-structured with some open-ended and some detailed questions guiding the conversation. Each of the interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

We first conducted a pilot study of ten married new fathers. Five had working spouses while the other five had stay-at-home wives. After reviewing the results of the pilot study we modified the criteria to include children up to age 4 years, and to exclude fathers with stay-at-home spouses. Our intent was to focus more closely on fathers in dual career couples who seemed more likely to experience greater stress in trying to balance fatherhood and career.

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*My father didn't tell me  
how to live; he lived, and  
let me watch him do it.*

CLARENCE BUDINGTON  
KELLAND, AUTHOR

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Including the pilot, we conducted 33 interviews for the study. Some of the interviews were conducted in person though most were done by phone. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and we analyzed the transcripts looking for common themes in the data. Since our primary interest was how new dads experience fatherhood and how that influ-

ences their views on work and career, we searched primarily for themes that touched on these issues. We then analyzed the various themes and constructed this report.

Our conversations with new fathers occurred over a one year period. Our interviews generally lasted about one hour and focused on "how life had changed" for these men since becoming fathers. We focused on their experiences both at home and in the workplace in order to better understand how becoming a father had impacted their career and family identities.

The sample is predominately white and all but one of the fathers were in heterosexual relationships. The participants worked in a broad cross section of industries including high technology, financial services, public accounting, legal services, manufacturing and government. The vast majority were employed in for-profit organizations. The participants' median age was 33 and most worked as senior individual contributors or first-to-mid level managers. Their job titles included, for example, account

executive, software development director, accounting manager, financial analyst, consultant, scientist, sales executive, sales manager, managing director, project manager, and HR manager. Nearly all were satisfied with their jobs (range of 6-10 on a 1-10 scale, 10 being most positive) and on average they worked just under 50 hours per week. Most had one child, and 6 had more than one child. On average they had been married for five years. Additional descriptive information about the study sample is included in Appendix B.

For the purposes of this study, we have assigned pseudonyms to all of the participants to help the reader identify with the person being quoted, while maintaining our participants' anonymity.

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*My son turned ten just the other day  
He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play  
Can you teach me to throw", I said "Not today  
I got a lot to do", he said, "That's ok"  
And he walked away but his smile never dimmed  
And said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah  
You know I'm gonna be like him"*

HARRY CHAPIN, SINGER/SONGWRITER

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# THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Our analysis of the interview data we collected showed a shift in new father attitudes and behaviors that is consistent with the research findings highlighted in the earlier sections Changing Generational Values and Changing Role of Men. The men in our study were clearly re-thinking and re-defining traditional gender based roles. They were very happy in their roles as fathers and doing their best to spend time with their children and be good fathers. Their own fathers worked full-time while their mothers for the most part stayed home and cared for them, at least while they were young children. The new dads in our study were working hard to better share both the childcare and home care duties with their spouses.

In many cases the men were not prepared for how much work it can be to take care of a young child. They choose to spend this time with their children, often at the expense of personal activities they previously enjoyed. Often their priorities changed to focus more on family and less on work. In some cases they adjusted their ambitions for professional advancement and career to take into account their new responsibilities and joys. As these new fathers in our study adjusted to this new child in their lives, there were many impacts that we observed. We have laid out our research findings to highlight the important impacts that becoming a new father has on the fathers themselves, on their marriages, on their work, and on their careers.

## THE PERSONAL IMPACT OF FATHERHOOD

### Definition of “A Good Father”

One of the key issues we hoped to explore through the study was “What is the meaning of fatherhood today and does it differ from the traditional or stereotypical views that were held of fathers in days gone by (e.g. father as breadwinner, father as disciplinarian, etc.)?” From our interviews it became clear that the father as a primary (not sole) breadwinner was still an integral component of these fathers’ identities. However, other equally important themes emerged in our interviews as well (i.e. being a good provider but ...). As one of the fathers, Alex, put it, *“I think being a good father – it’s hard. A little bit less though just putting food on the table, and more raising the child, being involved in their life, being a good role model for them, and encouraging them, providing emotional support.”*

A good deal of the emphasis was placed on the emotional aspects of being a father. Words and phrases such as listening, understanding, compassion, being a role model, less a disciplinarian, more a friend all emerged in our discussion. It was clear that providing emotional support was just as important as financial support. As Tom, an Organization Development Director of an insurance company summed it up:

*“I think [being a father] means a lot of things. It means love. It means demonstrating your love for someone and a commitment to them at all costs. So supporting them, nurturing them, being there, and I think not only as a father, but as a friend, as a guide, as a mentor.”*

The theme of *“being there, being present, spending time, being accessible”* was oft repeated. *“To be very participatory, to take an active interest, to spend time just being in the same room together”* was the way one of the dads described it. William, a sales executive for a technology startup, expressed a similar sentiment in his response:

*“Obviously being a good provider is important to me. Knowing [my son] has what he needs, his being safe is important to me. I think just enjoying life is a generic way of saying it. ‘You want to go outside? Let’s go outside. I don’t care if it’s raining or snowing out, let’s go outside. You want to hang out with the dogs? Let’s hang out with the dogs.’ It’s not on my terms, this is our time together.”*

## Role Models for Fatherhood

Through one of the first questions in our discussions we delved into the personal and career histories of the participants, focusing on how they developed their sense of career and paternal identity. Not surprisingly, most of the participants focused on their parents and most often their fathers, as their primary role model.

Evan, a computer analyst for a large investment company stressed the critical role his father had played in helping him to define what it meant to be a good father / parent:

*“He’s the president of a small business. We were always sort of around that, whether coming in to help out in his office, doing little tasks, or I worked there when I was in high school. He had a very strong influence on how I think about the mix of work and family and why I find it important not to work so many hours now. He was always home at reasonable hours ...he would balance doing that kind of thing at work with coming home and doing yard work with us, house projects. That’s the one thing I got from him, he was always tearing something apart and I’m starting to do that.”*

Another participant, Peter, age 29, echoed this sentiment when he said *“I think seeing my father’s approach to [work-family] gave me a fairly balanced outlook on the way I actually approached it as well.”*

The lack of a father’s presence or the lack of a positive example in some cases led those men to also develop ideals of fatherhood, but in reaction to their lack of a personal role model. Dan, who is in the military but who was attending an MBA program on a full-time basis at the time we met, describes his experiences in this way:

*“My family life growing up, that’s a separate interview altogether. I came from a family that, you know, my dad and mom divorced at a very early age. My dad was always working. I don’t think that shaped my views on the whole balance stuff...my two siblings and I both stayed with my mom and my dad was kind of in the fringes. Later on he came back into our life...Back to the original question, I don’t think that directly affected how I see my role as a father, but I guess in very general terms you always try to improve upon the experiences you had which isn’t to say that my dad wasn’t a good father. But there are definitely some things I would like to do differently.*

INT: Any particular example?

*Just level of engagement I guess, you know, to get more involved in my son’s activities as he grows up. Probably more than my dad did. I think the way I would like to participate in [my son’s] development is different too. I think my dad just always kind of set the line in the sand and if you strayed outside of the acceptable, those boundaries, he was there to provide some incentives to get back on the right path. And you know, I think I’d like to have a little bit more of a give and take interaction, kind of a mentorship role with my son.”*



In addition to their father's role modeling, participants also learned a great deal by observing how their parents interacted and shared responsibilities for child rearing and domestic tasks. Rob, a director of a non-profit economic development agency, had perhaps the most conspicuously "shared care" arrangement with his wife, a full-time teacher and Ivy-League educated lawyer. Rob spoke about the example his parents had set for him in this respect:

*"My parents—my father is a Buddhist minister, and my mother is a public school teacher. She taught elementary school. The way the Buddhist Temples are kind of structured there is that—it is a pretty loose kind of work day. A lot of my father's actual work occurred in the evenings and weekends. Funerals, services, meetings, stuff like that, so during the day, he had a little bit more flexibility.*

*So growing up, my father was the one cooking us breakfast, taking us to school, picking us up from school—watching us. Mom would come in after she got off from her work day. And then, mom helped out from there. So I would say now at least, in terms of kind of seeing the sharing of the workload? I would say I got a lot from that.*

INT: And did you view that as a model for you?

*I saw that as more of the norm — I mean, I didn't know any different, right? And you know, just as being the kids of the Buddhist minister, it could be pretty rough in terms of demands of my parents, so we were pretty much raised by a bunch of people who were very active in the church. So you know, baby-sitting. Or sleeping over their houses - during services they'd watch us. So, it was very much a communal kind of upbringing."*

In addition to parental influence, meanings of good fathering and fatherhood also seemed to be shaped by making comparisons with friends. Lew, a 45 year-old scientist in our study stated, *"I would say in between your own childhood and seeing other people raise their children, that's probably the two things that influence how we're raising our child the most."*

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*By the time a man realizes that maybe his father was right, he usually has a son who thinks he's wrong.*

CHARLES WADSWORTH  
PIANIST

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Other participants echoed a similar sentiment about watching how their peers were raising their children and drawing lessons from these observations. In Craig's case, he tried to emulate the example of some close family friends. *"I have some really close friends I look up to. I just look at the ways they live their lives as families and workers."* In other cases, such examples can serve as *"what I don't want to do"* as was the case for Evan. He and his wife had decided she would stop working when the baby was born, and watching the experiences of

friends in a dual career couple reinforced that the decision Evan and his wife made was the right one for them. As Evan stated, *"I have friends who have 3 month old babies and they drop them off at daycare. I can't even imagine doing that."*

### **Anticipation of Becoming a Father**

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the men were not sure what to expect when they became fathers. For example, two of our study participants, Craig and Sam, stated:



*“I envisioned that it would be difficult and that I would have trouble wanting to find the time to be a parent...I had no understanding of the emotional bond genetically that occurs when you have a baby...I think it’s very hard for a man especially to really understand what’s going to happen.” [Craig, entrepreneur]*

*“I knew I would probably like it. But the negative side of it was, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m going to be responsible for this kid for 18 years! [gasp]’” [Sam, account executive]*

This lack of understanding and inability to grasp what to expect changed very quickly when their babies were born. The fathers we spoke with were profoundly impacted by the birth of their children and expressed nearly universally positive reactions to that event. Some typical reactions to becoming a father included:

*“Just elation. Just absolute elation. Seeing a beautiful baby boy come out of what was an unbelievably difficult delivery was like a gift. It was like a blessing.” [Sam]*

*“It hit me in a way that nothing else ever has... It was just absolutely overwhelming in a positive way.” [Paul]*

*“...it was the first time in my life I ever cried from happiness...it was a very new sensation for me to be that happy.” [Josh]*

In addition, there were a number of participants who also experienced fear and anxiety at the same time in regards to the daunting responsibility of caring for and raising their child. Dan admitted feeling absolutely terrified.

*“Absolute terror, yeah. It was overwhelming. I think it kind of made me experience feelings that I didn’t know were even out there.”*

As Lew pointed out, the responsibility can be overwhelming.

*“You don’t quite know what’s coming. And you feel kind of a responsibility drops like a piano in a carton on your shoulders. It’s frightening. It’s exciting but scary. Mostly scary right at first.”*

### **Best Aspects of Being a Father**

Since the participants now had an average of nearly 18 months experience as a father, we asked them to reflect on what they liked best about fatherhood. Their responses focused primarily on the feeling of being a “real” family for the first time, the close emotional bonds they felt with their new child, and having the opportunity to watch their child develop. Somewhat surprisingly, even the heightened sense of responsibility was mentioned as one of the positive outcomes of being a new father.

Among the best aspects, about half of our participants talked about building a loving relationship with another human being. It’s clear from the comments that their children’s smiles have a remarkable impact on the new dads, and the tenderness they feel towards their children comes through clearly in their words.

*“One of the best parts of being a Dad is sharing those moments, and having a relationship with him that, admittedly, my wife says, ‘I don’t have that relationship.’ And knowing that it’s a unique kind of a relationship that you’re nurturing, you’re building, and*

*you're spending the time with him to do that."* [William]

*"There are moments where you are going to pick him up. And, he sees you and just gets that huge smile on. You know those moments of him giggling and falling asleep on your shoulder. Those things just are priceless. Nothing can beat that."* [Jesse]

*"It's almost indescribable because being a father right now doesn't mean anything other than just spending time with your child and, I mean it's, it's a weird thing because you didn't think you'd be able to love another human being like this. But I love being a father so much more than I thought I would and I can't say exactly why except that spending time with my daughter...the highlight of my day is in the morning when I hear her start to wake up and I can just go in there and pick her up. -- And how do you, how do you define that other than [love]".* [Josh]

The new fathers in our study were also very excited about the opportunity to watch and assist in another person's growth.

*"I mean I love just being with them and playing with them. You know, you watch them smile and laugh, seeing them figure out things on their own and wondering how they figured it out."* [Matt]

*"She is only five months old but she already recognizes me when I walk in and gives me a smile and is happy to see me. You [have a] feeling like you have really accomplished something and you've produced something that is a contributing member of society someday ... I've been working on teaching her how to sit up on her own and when she actually does sit up on her own a little bit without toppling right over - - that's a great feeling."* [Richard]

They talked about the joy and happiness they feel and the ability to share that joy with others. As Anthony shared in his interview:

*"The joy of when they wake up, when they smile at you and when they grab your hand and every single second being with them is just fun and enjoyable. Even when they're sad or they're mad at you for whatever reason, you're not giving them what they want to eat or something or it's just it's always something new with them. And everything's a discovery. And, everything's an adventure that it's just fun to - even just sit back and watch them play. That aspect of it is fantastic."*

Many of our participants also felt that one of the best aspects of being a father is being responsible for another living person and influencing what they become. As Sam commented, *"I think the best aspect of being a father is, just...knowing that I am responsible now for another human being. His well being, entirely-he's completely dependent on us."* Or as Corey said, *"It's a huge responsibility, but it's also something that I take a lot of pride in. I really want to be a good father. And following that goal I try and be a better [person than] I might otherwise be."*

Several of the new fathers relished the thought of starting a family and bringing someone new into the world. A few talked about enjoying the day-to-day activities, time spent playing with their child, and some were looking forward to a time with even more possibilities for interaction. In addition, there were a number of instances of self-discovery that our participants felt were important. As Tim stated,

*“It’s challenging at times. It brings insight. You find yourself having to actually think about things you had done automatically for years. And you ask yourself ‘do I want my children emulating this?’”*

Don summarized the change that had taken place in his life:

*“It puts life in perspective. How important is money, is career, is vacation? There’s more to life than [these things]. There are lots of opportunities, learning opportunities for myself about my own temperament, my own desires and interests. There’s a self discovery benefit.”*

## Challenges of Fatherhood

Of course there are many trying aspects of fatherhood as well. We asked our participants what they like least about being a father. Some of the expected subjects came up such as changing diapers, preparing meals, being “tested” by a 2 year old, dealing with a crying child, and the cost of child care. Quite a few of the participants raised the issue of simply being tired and that being a father was more work than they expected.

*“Gosh, so it’s a lot more work than I ever imagined. The lack of control is phenomenally frustrating because you just don’t know what night you will get a full night sleep.” [Don]*

*“Probably the lack of free time and the late nights, you know the middle of the night stuff. I think my wife and I share that middle of the night (a lot). It’s just tough.” [Ben]*

This extra work and fatigue can cause some strain on a marriage.

*“I think it’s also sometimes the responsibility, if you like it or not. Sometimes crying in the middle of the night, and having to take care of her, or having to -- something comes up, and I have to cancel an appointment, because I need to take her to an appointment. I think just priorities have changed. So if my priorities or my business haven’t changed, or aren’t flexible, then it’s sometimes difficult negotiations with myself or with my wife on what I should be doing.” [Charles]*

This new responsibility, this new commitment of time and energy leads to the concerns mentioned most often by our study participants – less personal time, little uninterrupted time and less time for other pursuits. As William commented:

*“Sometimes I wish I had time to myself. Sometimes I will kind of close my office door and say, ‘Okay, this is Dad time.’ I need time just to sit down and veg out in front of the Internet, or whatever it is. You know, grab a beer, and watch a football game, or -- I do miss some of that. I miss the ability of being able to pick up a project and doing that project.”*

And finally, a few participants said that the aspect they liked least about being a father was having to miss important parts of their kids’ lives. As Keith summarized, *“A least favorite aspect of being a father is I’ve got to leave and go to work every day.”*

## Changes Resulting from Becoming a Father

We explored with our new fathers the ways in which becoming a father had changed them. Most, called fatherhood a life-changing event but it did not necessarily change all of the men we spoke with dramati-

cally. Perhaps not surprisingly, due to the lack of time for personal pursuits, one of the common themes was best expressed by Lew who simply replied half-kiddingly, *“I’m definitely more boring.”*

Most described the changes that they had experienced in their own lives in compelling ways. For these men, becoming a father was a growing and maturing experience that left them with a higher level of patience and empathy for others. As Grant, a sales manager stated, *“I think as a manager I’ve definitely lightened up because I understand now that having a family and trying to get stuff done, work, family, all that stuff – there’s only so much time in a day.”* Mark agreed, saying that he is *“more patient and understanding of others.”* Matt also echoed this saying *“I think I’ve always been a patient person but I think I’m more patient, more understanding with people in general.”*

Another effect of fatherhood seems to have been an increase in focus and clarity in priorities. One father put it very succinctly *“I’m more focused on those two priorities, work and family.”* Another father, Tom said:

*“I look back to being in Boston when he was born. We kind of were just floating and saying oh, we’ll figure things out. And I think it really hit home. Okay, we got someone who is depending on us that we need to support. We need to come up with a longer term plan. We need to get closer to family that can help us out with some of the care giving from time-to-time. We need to establish ourselves in a place that we’re comfortable with. It’s less crowded; it’s more conducive to a family. So I think it changed my outlook on life considerably. And that it’s no longer just about me ...”*

The other thing that fathers emphasized was the way that fatherhood had increased the meaning in their lives, their sense of purpose. Patrick, a financial analyst from Boston, reflected:

*“I feel like I have a real purpose, not that I was a zero before but I never really, with my job, felt like I was making a difference I guess. I know that sounds extreme – but I feel like I have a purpose now. I know that sounds kind of deep, I guess.”*

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IMPACT

It is clear that becoming a father has had a significant impact on our study participants. They have altered their lives to adjust to their major new responsibility as well as a significant new interpersonal relationship with a child. The large majority of our study participants have working spouses (28 of 33), and most of these work full-time. The median hours worked per week for the majority of spouses who did work is 40 and the range is from 10 hours to more than 60 hours/week. In this section we will explore the approaches that the partners take to navigate these major new responsibilities for child care and household responsibilities on top of their full-time jobs.

### Sharing Care Giving

One of the key questions we wanted to explore with study participants was how these new fathers and their spouses shared care-giving responsibilities. Most fathers said that they were striving to achieve a 50/50 split in terms of responsibilities for care giving. Where they fell short, they stated that they were working to address this. Particularly those with very young children spoke of the fact that their wives’ leave of absences coupled with breast feeding made it difficult for the care giving to be 50/50. But as the children aged and the wives returned to work, most participants suggested that an equal share of co-parenting was the goal. When asked to rate themselves as a care-giver on a scale of 1-5 (1 being not at all involved and 5 being very involved), the participants rated themselves a 4.16 out of 5 on average.

Although there was some hedging on the question including frequent, half-joking references to, “Do you mean compared to my wife?” the general sentiment was simply put by Mark, a consultant, whose reply was, “We try to be close to 50/50 in terms of responsibilities. We generally alternate pretty evenly on all of that stuff.”

When asked for greater specificity, most of the men described in greater detail the ways they divided up the care giving responsibilities with their wives in order to accommodate each spouse’s work schedule. Charles, a real estate broker, described how the duties were negotiated to fit each spouse’s schedule.

*“In the mornings ... my wife has to go [in] earlier than I do. So I take care of the morning shift of getting [my daughter] dressed, feeding her breakfast and taking her to day care... until about 5:30, and that’s when my wife picks her up.”*

John, a 36 year old IT manager, described a similar pattern, reminding us that the schedule was not fixed and was subject to adjustments as needed:

*“It’s a lot of give and take. In the morning I wake her up, get her dressed and I get her out the door. [My wife] picks her up, she takes care of her while she’s cooking, and when I get home we feed her together, sit down as a family for dinner as much as possible. Then she takes care of her while I do the dishes and then we play for a while. I put her to bed.”*

On average the fathers stated that they believed they spent 3.3 hours per workday with their children and in care giving activities. This is consistent with (but somewhat exceeds) the findings in recent studies, that suggest the average time fathers spend with their children has doubled over the last three decades to about 3 hours per work day (Galinsky, Aumann, Kerstin, & Bond, 2008). One caution in reflecting on these findings is that we did not seek or obtain validation of these time estimates using other tracking methodologies or by asking the participants’ spouses for their estimates.

### The Stay-at-Home Father Option

As previously mentioned, both spouses work in most U.S. couples with children under the age of 18. In those cases where there is one spouse at home full time 97% of the time, that person is female. In spite of the many changes we have discussed in women’s work roles and changing family structures,

*When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.*

MARK TWAIN, AUTHOR

very few fathers are choosing to stay-at-home full-time to raise their children. This reminds us of an old New Yorker cartoon which depicts a husband and wife walking together as the husband comments, “Of course I want to have kids Claire – just not all the time.”

The participants in our study seemed to reflect this reality of the US workforce. While the question at times elicited a smile from the participants, most suggested that they had at least considered the option of being a stay-at-home father. However, only 2 of 33 participants had considered this a realistic possibility. For most, family finances were the major stumbling block. Perhaps the fact that we targeted dual career couples with both spouses working full-time, meant that for many of these couples both incomes were needed to sustain their standard of living. When asked about this option,

Patrick, who is a financial analyst for a major insurance company stated clearly “I never considered that, no. Would I like to? Sure. It just wasn’t financially feasible. There was no way.”

The persistent disparity in income levels between the husbands and wives also made this possibility less realistic. Even for couples who might have been able to make ends meet on one salary, often the higher salary was the man's so living on only the wife's income was unrealistic. As John, an IT manager stated, *"I've considered it and probably wouldn't mind doing it if the situation were that we could live on [my wife's] salary."*

Beyond the economic realities, the second major stumbling block was gender role stereotypes. Many of the participants had difficulty seeing themselves in the role of stay-at-home spouse and primary caregiver. Part of this derived from their own sense of career identity. We asked the participants about the importance of their career to how they define themselves. On a 1-5 scale the average response was 3.54 and the median response was 4. Most clearly felt a fairly strong connection between their careers and their identities, which influences their willingness to see themselves as a stay-at-home parent.

A number of participants suggested that being a stay at home spouse did not fit with their views of themselves as a primary breadwinner. Equally important was the feeling that for a man to choose this option might be seen as not living up to his financial provider role in the eyes of others. As one participant Matt candidly shared with us:

*"As appealing as it sounds, spending a lot of time with the children, there's a certain point, I'd say of embarrassment or stigma, if I were to become a stay-at-home father just because that's not the norm. Part of me could see myself doing this, but the other part would be like, what will friends say; what will the family say?"*

It is clear that after many years of struggle, women have earned legitimacy in both the home and work spheres. For the most part, moving from one sphere to another, or having a foot in each for some periods of time, is now considered both legitimate and commonplace. However, men have not experienced a similar revolution in terms of their role in the home and family sphere. It seems that men who consider this are quick to put this option out of the realm of possibility, not only due to financial factors, but also because of their preconceived notions of what "real men do."

### **Conversations and Negotiations with Partners**

Although not an explicit question in our study design, a point which arose frequently and not surprisingly was the role that conversation and coordination play in making parenthood successful (or not.) While the old model of one breadwinner – one caregiver had many drawbacks one of its attributes was a clear delineation of duties. The dual-career couple model, by contrast, leaves a considerable amount of room for role conflict, hand-offs, coordination, and unfortunately, confusion.

Conversations run a spectrum from simply discussing the mechanics and schedule of the family to loftier issues. Sometimes, they were even about the way the couples chose to structure or shape their communications with each other. As Sam stated in his interview:

*"But having a child, certainly at first, was stressful on our relationship. We were fighting about stupid stuff. Probably ... just like most couples, they fight about the dumbest things. But the one thing that was so important to me being a father, is that I didn't want [our children to] grow up in a family like my parents who bickered a lot. I wanted to make sure, so my wife and I have made a pact that we would never - hopefully never - yell or raise our voice in front of [our child]."*

On rare occasions in the interviews, it was clear that an issue was recurring, because it continued to be unresolved. In these instances, saying it was a "topic of conversation" seemed to be code (intended



or unintended) for “this is a place where we are not in agreement”. One of the younger fathers in the study, Gerald, exemplified this when he discussed his reluctance to modify his pre-fatherhood lifestyle since becoming a dad:

*“I play a lot of recreational sports. That’s – that’s very important to me. So between working a lot and playing a decent number, maybe three or four times a week of soccer or Frisbee or something along those lines, I’m out of the house a lot. And so trying to figure out a good division of labor with my wife being home a lot ... that’s definitely something that – that we’re still working on figuring out.”*

Fortunately, most conversations tended to focus on the mundane but important complexities of shared care. As Paul described it:

*“There’s a complex interplay between two working parents vs. one. If you’re not a two working parent family, you will never appreciate it. I mentioned how I do drop off and pick up, but even those events, like sometimes my wife will call me and say, ‘I’ve got a 4:00 PM meeting with so and so that I have to go to.’ Okay, so I’ve got to cut mine short. Sometimes that meeting may pop up at noon so I’ve only got half-a-day to react and adjust my schedule. It works but it’s being constantly in tune to the schedule to know that you can do that.”*

One participant spoke candidly about the challenges that occurred in his relationship with his spouse:

*“I think in a lot of ways, it’s helped. And I guess initially-I’d say the first year or so there were lots of steps backwards in our marriage. But once you sort of step back and delve into what the real problems are, it’s opened up a whole new world of communication between her and I. So, we’ve probably been strengthened since that one year of hardships-that we never projected onto our daughter because that was rule number one. We were both clear about that-just suppress it. And then it just started getting-it started affecting us more and more. And now, we’re starting to come out of it-and feel good again about where our ideals are-and how we act on those in a positive way.” [Patrick]*

## WORKPLACE IMPACT

With all of the changes taking place in the fathers as individuals, and in their relationships at home, we wanted to also explore how these changes were impacting fathers in the workplace. For the most part, the fathers in our study found their workplace experiences quite positive. Many fathers had adjusted their schedules and the total number of hours they worked to make more time for their family responsibilities. In general, their bosses and work cultures supported the informal flexibility that they needed. Some found it difficult to combine work and family, primarily because of the number of hours they had to work, often in connection with a demanding job, boss, or office culture.

### Workplace Responses

We asked participants to reflect on the overall experiences of becoming a father in an organizational context. We found that virtually all of the men in our study had very positive experiences. As one participant put it, *“My organization is not inhibiting me from being the kind of father I want to be.”*

One of the questions we explored was, *“Did becoming a father change how others perceived or responded to you?”* Most felt that becoming a father had a positive impact on how others saw them in the work-

place. About half said the difference was minor and half felt it was more significant. Even in the cases where the changes were deemed minor, they were nonetheless positive:

*"I think it does have a little impact. You put a picture on your desk and it encourages people who probably would never have stopped by to say, oh, tell me about your son. So it's a social thing, it's only a positive." [Evan]*

Becoming a father seemed to have "softened the edges" and made it easier for individuals to be seen as approachable and accessible. The men often felt they were able to make better social connections with others at work who are parents. They felt they were now "members of the parenting club." As Patrick, a manager in an insurance firm stated, *"I'm developing relationships with people at work that you probably wouldn't have if you didn't have a child. It's such a big thing and establishes a common rapport."*

Another very important dimension of becoming a father was the view that being a father granted an individual a greater aura of credibility, maturity and responsibility. This theme was echoed by many participants. They felt they were viewed as more serious (in a career sense) by their peers. Mark, a consultant, stated that *"I think it makes people think, it gives them the perception I'm older or more mature than before."* Patrick also commented *"It definitely feels like people would be more apt to give me more responsibility."* This was echoed by Sam who also made reference to a common perception that

you are now considered as a member of the club, *"I thought it would be positive. They would look at me as '[Sam's] finally getting serious. He's now one of us, one of the club members.'"*

*I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it.*

PRESIDENT HARRY S TRUMAN

The overarching message from the interviewees was that there was a difference in how they were perceived, and this difference was virtually always positive. Throughout all 33 interviews, not a single concern was expressed in the workplace that fatherhood would somehow interfere with or diminish a new father's career focus. This stands in stark contrast to the reaction which many women perceive upon becoming a new mother. Recent research (Correll, Benard, & Paik,

2008) reinforced the view that when women become mothers, they are often perceived as not only less committed to their careers, but also surprisingly less competent and less promotable. By contrast, the men in our study reported no negative ramifications of their change in status to father and in fact strongly suggested that reactions were exclusively positive in terms of how they were perceived by their employer.

## Manager Support of Work-Family Balance

A major concern (almost pre-occupation) in the work-life literature and research regards the degree of support that people feel they receive from their direct manager. Even in organizations that enjoy outstanding reputations as "family friendly", many individuals are reluctant to raise their work-family concerns or desires with their manager out of fear that they will be seen as less committed to their work and their employer. This concern is so widespread that it has been studied and termed the "implementation gap" between espoused work-life policies and actual practice (Van Deusen & James, 2008.)

Given this concern, we were pleasantly surprised that the majority of the fathers in our study spoke in very positive terms of how supportive their manager was on work-family issues. Only a handful said that they did not feel supported. While virtually all of the fathers in our study were using informal flexibility (i.e. they had not requested or been granted a formal change in their schedules), they felt their managers were quite supportive of the work-life challenges they faced. As Evan, an analyst in the



financial services industry stated:

*“My boss is extremely understanding, has had no problems with me taking time to do all the stuff I needed to do. We have both men and women in my area who work 3-day work weeks or work from home on Mondays and come in the rest of the week.”*

This support seemed to extend to not only the challenges faced by new fathers, but also other work-family issues as well. Grant, an area sales manager for a large information provider, reflected on his own circumstances, but also those of a close colleague who was in the middle of a divorce:

*“A colleague of mine is going through a divorce right now. And ... talk about [a boss] being supportive. It’s always nice to be supportive in good times when you have kids. [But] she’s super supportive of this guy, and he is really on the ropes right now.”*

It may be that what we are seeing reflects the trends in the larger society where younger managers, who are much more likely than the previous generation to be in two-career couples or single parent families, have a higher level of understanding for the work-family challenges that such employees face. In addition, the challenging economic environment of the past year, coupled with the extremely high level of downsizing that has occurred may be giving managers greater empathy as well. As Patrick stated in describing his own manager’s situation:

*“He’s got three kids of his own, a great family and he understands the balance necessary. I think he’s actually had an epiphany in the past couple of years. He’s been handling a lot with the company shrinking ... feeling a little overwhelmed. He bought a house on the Cape that he sort of uses as a refuge. I think he and his family have re-discovered themselves basically.”*

### **Ease of Combining Work and Family**

When asked, more than half of our participants stated that their current roles made it relatively easy to combine work and family.

*“So far it’s proven to be fairly easy. I’m pretty fortunate in that the people that I work with also have families. So, there’s a lot of general understanding in the office as to what it actually takes to have a family, which is nice.” [Anthony]*

*“I have a laptop and I’m not tied to a specific location to do work. There aren’t a lot of occasions where I have to work late into the night or on weekends.” [Peter]*

Various forms of flexibility, mostly informal, greatly facilitated this. Flexibility was mentioned by most of the participants as being important to successfully combine work and family, in addition to a supportive boss and a supportive culture.

*“I think the organization is very overt in its espoused values around work life balance. I think that the leadership in my area supports a strong work life balance, and is willing and flexible. My manager’s very willing and flexible - willing to make accommodations and allow me to do whatever I need to do to meet the needs of my family when necessary.” [Tom]*

*“I would say it has been easy. And it’s less the job, because I know other people who have*

*my job who feel like they can't, or have decided that they can't do it and have a family. In my particular case, my employer has been very accommodating in allowing me flexibility when I'm here, and then also is understanding on days when my kid is sick or something comes up, where they understand that as long as I get the work done, they're fine if I'm not in the office as much. So my employer has been outstanding on that."* [Tim]

For those that did not find it easy to combine work and family, the primary issue they raised was the number of hours they had to work, often in connection with a demanding job, boss, or office culture. In one case, Craig referred to his former employer's culture (he had since moved on) and in the other Keith reflected on the realities of the long work hours that are often inherent in public accounting:

*"I think it was very difficult. It was a high-pressure job, a venture backed start up. The CEO, father of 3, spent just about no time with his kids and expected the same of his direct reports. So there was a company corporate mentality of work first, family second. A number of times I was asked to stay late, until midnight or whatever, even though I had family plans, the CEO would just say well this is really important."* [Craig]

*"I think it goes both ways. I think public accounting allows flexibility in the scheduling that allows me to be at home where I can have some family time, yet there's a pretty strong demand on my time from work that takes the other route. In the year that I was working 70 hrs per week, that generally was working until around 6:00, go home, see my wife, see the baby. Stay at home to around 9:00 then come back to the office and work 3 nights a week till 12:00."* [Keith]

And the particular job or role clearly plays an important factor as do the expectations of the father and the family.

*"Maybe, it just depends on the... people you're working with and the type of project you're working on. So, for some people it's very easy to make that combination happen and for others it's not. And also, it just depends on family's expectations and your expectations how much time you need to spend with your family. I know one colleague of mine, who is very content being on the road Monday through Thursday and spending half the day Friday and then all weekend with his family. And they seem fine with that too. And then another colleague, former colleague actually of mine, lost a job because he couldn't travel for whatever reason. It just depends on what your personal and your family tolerance is, I think."* [Kit]

## Impact on Work

Most of the fathers anticipated that becoming a father would impact their work, but most also underestimated the degree of impact. As Charles, a real estate broker stated,

*"I had an idea, but I didn't know how. I knew it would impact upon me and my schedule, I didn't know, you don't know until you really go through it. So I had no idea what to expect, and I'm still learning. It's been a whole year and I'm still trying to learn. I still don't know what to expect (laughs)."*

William echoed a very similar message in his response.

*“I realized that it would happen. I didn’t realize to the significance. I think for me, all of a sudden the pregnancy, and then the fatherhood piece; I was just like ‘Hey, this is my focus.’ So I didn’t realize how quickly I would put some of that stuff on the back burner and de-prioritize some of those [work] things.”*

Quickly some of the fathers found themselves in situations that brought their new reality to light. Obviously, the new baby had dramatically altered life on the home front, but in some cases, work situations arose that made the idea of work-family conflict less theoretical and more real. Matt’s story provides an excellent example:

*“When the [baby] was born, I was asked to travel to ten different offices around the country. And I was like ‘You know my kid is a month old. My wife is getting used to being a mother. I’m getting used to being a father.’ So, it was one of those things where I had to make a decision. Luckily, I was able to get out of it but I realized that there will probably be a lot more moments where you have to pick one or the other.”*

But at this early state, at least some of the fathers did not see the conflicts that had arisen as completely problematic. Some saw the need to balance their lives and focus less on work as a welcomed change to their work-focused past. As one father stated:

*“I took the realist approach. I knew I wasn’t going to be, not so much productive, I knew I wasn’t going to have my mind on [my job] 100% of the time. If my daughter’s sick one day, obviously my mind is going to be on that, but to be honest that was the part that excited me. I didn’t want to think about my job 24/7.”*

## CAREER IMPACT

In this final section of the research findings, we examine the perceived career impact that becoming a father has had on our participants. It was clear that becoming a father had a significant impact on them personally. We wanted to know how this impact carried over to their career expectations and realities.

*You may give them your love  
but not your thoughts, for  
they have their own thoughts.  
You may strive to be like  
them, but seek not to  
make them like you.  
For life goes not backward  
nor tarries with yesterday.*

KAHLIL GIBRAN, POET

While a number of fathers suggested that their career aspirations had not changed dramatically, the general sentiment seemed to be that the participants had altered their view of what constituted success. Some were just coming to grips with the possibility of lower levels of career progression when viewed through a traditional career development perspective (i.e. career success as determined by organizational level achieved). As one father stated, *“The title is somewhat important to me which I am sort of having a problem with right now, trying to work that out. Am I going to be okay not being a VP of something in five years? I’m sort of dealing with that right now and I haven’t come to any conclusions.”* But more of the fathers were clear that they were prepared to either lower their expectations or at

least, accept a lower rung on the ladder as long as they were happy in their personal lives. As two of our participants stated:

*“I’m not so ambitious. I could keep moving up ... but I know that will come with other requirements as well. I’m happy where I am now. I don’t want the pendulum to swing*

*back in the other direction where it was before, where it's going to encroach on my ability to spend quality time with my family."* [Tom, age 34]

*"When my first child was born, I was working at the law firm and there's always an aspiration of becoming partner and the expectation of having to bring in the business, do a lot of travel... With my new job and the second child, if I was never to advance a whole lot career wise, I'd be happy because the work is good, the money is good and you know, the family is happy."* [Matt, age 37]

A few of the fathers mentioned that a heightened sense of "doing work that mattered" as well as finding the right balance that resulted from becoming a father. As one stated, *"I think if anything, it's just strengthened my focus on wanting to do meaningful work that allows me to have balance. If anything, I might want to consider scaling back on my hours in the future."*

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Qualitative research studies should avoid making broad generalizations. The experience of 33 new fathers who self-nominated to participate in a study on fatherhood and careers is just that, nothing more. Based on these interviews we can only generalize about these 33 men, and even that can be dangerous. We also face the obvious limitation that the information we gleaned from these fathers was never verified through other methods (e.g. direct observation) or other sources (i.e. their spouses). Such limitations offer ample reason for us to be somewhat cautious in drawing our conclusions or in making recommendations for action.

With those caveats in mind, we still feel that this study offers some rich and highly useful insight into the world of today's new father. Unlike most of their fathers, these are men who fully expect their spouses to work and for most, continuously as their children are being raised. This alone accounts for a great deal of the narrative of fathers these days. A full-time working wife engaged in her chosen profession and contributing significantly to household income (an average of 44% of according to the U.S. Census) dramatically changes the playing field for today's working father (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This is the reality that most of the fathers in our study were experiencing.

Clearly the experience of these fathers is different from the reality that many of their wives experience. As we mentioned at the outset, our study was initiated as a complement to an earlier piece of research that was conducted by one of the authors, Jamie Ladge. When comparing our results to her study on new mothers, there are some striking differences between the experiences of new mothers and fathers that are worth noting, however obvious they may be. These are:

1. **Women face the prospect of taking leaves and then the challenge of re-entering the workplace, men do not.** All of the women in Ladge's 2008 study took a leave of at least 3 months to have their first child. Only one of the men in our study took a formal leave of more than three weeks. The rest left the workplace for very short periods of time following the birth of their first child. Giving birth, the exit and re-entry process, the length of time women are absent from their roles, and in many cases their continuing responsibility for feedings make the entire experience of having a child a much more significant and potentially traumatic life and career event for women than it is for men.
2. **Women often ask for some type of formal flexible work arrangement when returning to work, most men do not.** While most women in the Ladge study felt the need or desire to "contract" for an arrangement upon returning to work, the overwhelming majority of the men in our study did not. The fathers were far more likely to exercise informal flexibility rather than ask for a formal flexible work arrangement. While many of the men did use flexibility to be available to share childcare responsibilities (e.g. drop-off or pick-up at a childcare center), or attend physician's appointments, this was always done in an informal or "stealth" fashion. Virtually none of the men felt a lack of support from their manager or co-workers when utilizing flexibility.
3. **Many women experienced mixed or negative messages in returning to the workplace, none of the men did.** While most of the women in the Ladge motherhood study felt that they received negative or mixed messages in the workplace about their challenge of balancing work and family, virtually none of the men in our study encountered this. To the contrary, most men felt they received only positive feedback from their colleagues about their role as parents and that it had enhanced their reputation, credibility, and even career options. Women received far more mixed messages upon their return to work, regardless of the decision they had made in terms

of their employment status (e.g. those returning full-time were questioned about the care of their child, those returning part-time were questioned about the impact it would have on their careers.)

On one level, this last point creates an unfair advantage for men in the workplace. The expectation is that if anything they will be more responsible and committed to their career after becoming a father. However, this can also be a two-edged sword. The lack of negative reaction men receive may also signal that for men, becoming a parent should have no negative impact on their work. Men are not expected to make the compromises that nearly all parents must make, especially if they want to be fully

engaged parents. Therefore when fathers do sacrifice work commitments or opportunities for family reasons, it may be more surprising and potentially more detrimental to their careers than when women do so, because it is simply not accepted.

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*If the new American father feels bewildered and even defeated, let him take comfort from the fact that whatever he does in any fathering situation has a fifty percent chance of being right.*

BILL COSBY

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Our study leaves us with the sense that a profound shift is taking place with today's new dads. Overall, our research found fathers who were deeply committed to care-giving and sharing the work as evenly as possible with their spouses. While only a few had given serious consideration to staying at home full-time, it was also true that most of their spouses had also decided to stay in the workforce. Often, this was the result of a number of factors, including most notably the need for two incomes to support the family financially. In addition, most of the spouses had significant careers so their level of commit-

ment to their work made a decision to stay at home full-time more challenging.

While the fathers in our study were very career oriented and enjoyed high levels of satisfaction in their work, most seemed dual-centric (focused on both career and family equally) or perhaps leaned slightly more toward family. It seemed that often they described their work as enabling a life or lifestyle for their family, and that was its most important ingredient. Many responded that they would measure their career in a more holistic fashion and not simply by achieving some objective measure of success in the eyes of others. Virtually all had come to understand that being a parent would mean some compromise on their career front, most accepted it, and even embraced it.

As we think about next steps and implications for action, a few points stand out:

- Although organizational work-life policies are designed to be gender neutral, organizational cultures are not. There is still a strong cultural perspective that when men become fathers, little will change on the work front. As fathers take on a more equal responsibility for care giving and other family responsibilities, clearly the workplace perspective must change. The fathers we studied were often reducing their career expectations and desire to work long hours based on their new parental responsibilities. Employers need to see fatherhood as a more serious and time consuming role and stop assuming that being a good father simply equates to being a good breadwinner.
- At the close of our interviews, many of the fathers thanked us (surprisingly) for allowing them to participate. Some relayed that the interview provided the first structured opportunity that they had been given to reflect on and discuss their new and important roles. It seems that men want to have opportunities to discuss fatherhood, as well as their challenges in balancing their work and home lives. Providing more venues where this conversation is welcomed, both in and out of the workplace, would be beneficial as men strive to adjust to their new, more complex lives.

- If, as the 2009 report of the same title suggested, America has become *A Woman's Nation*, then surely now is the time to radically increase our focus on men's roles at home and with their families. As we stated at the outset, for many years it made sense for the Work-Life field to be dominated by women and focused on the unique challenges women faced. But it is time for a paradigm shift. If we want all people to feel like "whole persons", that means respecting the man's role as care-giver, cook, cleaner, nurturer, and comforter every bit as much as we respect the woman's role in the workplace. While humor will always be one of the most fundamental competencies in parenting, it is time to stop seeing men's role in the home and as parents as simply fodder for jokes about men's incompetence in this domain. As one of our colleagues often says, *"We would not accept disparaging comments about women's abilities in the workplace. Why do we think it is acceptable to make similarly disparaging comments regarding the incompetence of men as care takers and parents, when for so many men this is becoming one of the central roles of their lives?"* We couldn't agree more.

Men seem poised to embrace a new definition of fatherhood and to step up to the challenges and the rewards of parenting in a much fuller sense than was the case in the past. It is time we helped and encouraged them to do so.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For quite some time we, at the Boston College Center for Work & Family, have been very aware of the lack of research that has been done on the experiences of working fathers. The work-life / work-family (if you prefer) field has been dominated by women – including practitioners, researchers, consultants, advocates or the media, it's been a woman's world. This has been highly appropriate and sensible in light of the fact that (a) women do most of the child care and child rearing in this country and (b) for many years the gender roles have been fairly clearly defined. Men were defined as the breadwinner first and last and women were the ones who were facing the struggles of gaining legitimacy in the workplace while juggling their domestic roles. Therefore studying men's career paths seemed to make far more sense than studying their career-life dilemmas.

Things have most definitely changed and it is past time that we (and others) turn our attention to the issues of work and family for men, and in this case specifically fathers.

While not enough has been done in this arena, we would like to acknowledge those who have championed this issue for many years. It would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list but the work of scholars such as Joe Pleck, Jim Levine, Linda Haas, and Sam Osherson have provided us with an excellent starting point for our research. We also relied on the excellent resource *The National Study of the Changing Workforce*, conducted by Ellen Galinsky and her colleagues at the Families and Work Institute.

Our colleagues at the Center, Danielle Hartmann, Catie Maillard, Debbie Santiago, and in particular Jennifer Fraone, have been great advisors, helped with our research, and provided assistance with shaping and editing the report. As always, Dr. Annie Soisson of Tufts University has also been a great sounding board on the project and editor for this report. We would also like to thank those Center Corporate Partners who provided us with some of the subjects for the study.

Last, and certainly not least, we would like to thank the 33 fathers who agreed to participate in our research. Each was very generous with their time and offered us candid and thoughtful answers to our many questions. They are truly an impressive group of men and we have strong reason to believe that they will be equally impressive in their new and important roles as fathers.

Prof. Brad Harrington, Executive Director  
Boston College Center for Work & Family  
June 2010



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# APPENDIX A: THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Introduction: Thanks for participating!

This study is focused on men's experiences of combining fatherhood and a career. We're interviewing a small group of professional men who have recently become a father. Your identity will be held in confidence and just the thematic results will be used as a basis for refining the study. Note: ask them to send their resume if they haven't already done so prior to the interview.

The interview should take approximately 60-90 minutes. Before we get started, have you had a chance to review the consent form? Do you have any questions? Answer questions and collect signed copy.

As you answer our questions, please remember there are no right answers. Everyone is different; they have different experiences, and we want to learn about your thoughts and perspectives on what it was like for you to become a father.

## I. Warm Up

Let's begin by discussing your work history and current position.

1. Please briefly describe your career history to date.
2. What is your current role in your organization? How long have you been working in this role? Could you briefly summarize the key responsibilities of your position.
3. How long have you been working in your present organization?
4. What number of hours do you work? Can you describe a "typical" workweek?
5. How much travel is involved in your work? What is your typical commuting time?
6. Do you feel your current role is one in which is easy to combine work and family? Why or why not?
7. How would you describe your present role in terms of your overall satisfaction with it on a 1-10 scale where 10 is extremely satisfied?

## II. Questions regarding Personal History

Now I'm going to ask you a few questions on your personal history.

1. Could you provide some basic information regarding where you grew up and your education (High School, College, Graduate/Professional school, etc.)
2. How long have you and your wife/partner been married?
3. Does your wife/partner work? Please describe her current job.
4. How many hours does she work? What is a typical work day like?
5. Is his/her job flexible? How much travel is involved?
6. How old is your child(ren)?
7. How old are you?

I'd now like to move on and ask you to reflect for a bit on your career and personal history, and how that intersects with fatherhood.

1. What aspects of your history (critical life events - family life, religion, etc.) do you think have influenced your views of fatherhood and your career? Did/do both your parents work?

### **III. Career and Career Aspirations**

Now let's talk about your career and career aspirations.

1. Why do you work?
2. Do you consider your work a job, career, calling?
3. What are your career aspirations? 5 Years from now? 10 years from now?
4. How has your family (spouse, parents, in-laws) responded to your career?
5. Did you have a vision of what your life today would look like in terms of your career at this point and do these compare to your life today?
6. On a scale of 1-5, how important is your career to your identity, to how you define yourself (1 not important, 5 very important)? Why this number?

### **IV. Questions on Becoming a Father and Fatherhood**

1. Prior to becoming a dad, what did you anticipate it would be like to be a father?
2. Tell us about when you first became father? What were you feeling?
3. Did you anticipate that becoming a father would impact your career? In what ways?
4. Did you take a paternity leave or any time off after the birth of your child?
5. Have you considered/did you consider being a stay-at-home father?
6. Have you utilized/are you utilizing any flex time or alternative work arrangements in order to provide care for your child?

### **V. Questions on fatherhood in the workplace**

1. Did you think becoming a father would impact how others in the workplace would see you? If so, how? Now that you're already a dad, has there been any instances where your being a father has had an impact on your work?
2. Does your being a father, come up as a topic of conversation at work? Do you have conversations about balancing work-family issues?
3. Is your boss supportive of work-family policies and programs in general? In your specific case do you feel he/she has been supportive?
4. Are you co-workers supportive of work family policies?

## VI. Questions on Being a Father and Caregiving

1. Could you characterize how you and partner typically share care-giving responsibilities?
2. How many hours do you spend with your child per day? Per week? Could you clarify how you spend this time with your child?
3. On a scale of 1-5, how involved are you in the caregiving of your child (1 being not at all, 5 very involved). Explain your answer.
4. One of the ways that we look at how people integrate work and family is to determine if people are work-centric, family-centric, or dual-centric. A work-centric person will compromise personal or family obligations to meet work obligations. A family-centric person is the opposite. He will compromise work obligations to meet family obligations. A dual-centric person will go back and forth, depending on the particular situation. How would you characterize yourself?
5. Another way we look at this is a scale with “segmented” on one end and “integrated” on the other end. A segmented person keeps his work life separate from his family life and doesn’t blur the two. An integrated person often deals with family issues in the workplace and work issues while at home. He goes back and forth frequently. How would you characterize yourself on this dimension?

## VII. Questions Regarding Fatherhood and Career Identity

1. What does it mean to you to be a good father? On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate yourself as a father? Why?
2. Has being a father influenced your professional identity?
3. Is there anyone at work or in your personal life that you look to for guidance or follow in their footsteps with respect to balancing family and work? Explain.
4. What are the best aspects of being a father? What are the aspects you like least about being a father?
5. Do you feel you have changed in any way as a result of becoming a father? How?
6. Have your career aspirations changed as a result of becoming a father? In what ways?

Are there other things you’d like to discuss that you think are relevant but that we didn’t cover?

Can you recommend anyone who might be a good candidate for this study?

# APPENDIX B

Fatherhood Study Sample Descriptive Data: 33 Participants

	Average	Median	Range
Father age	34.03	33	28-47
Child age	11.55 mos	10 mos	1-48 mos
Job satisfaction	7.92	8	6-10
Paternity leave	10.82 days	10 days	3 days – 3 months
Imp. of career to identity	3.54	4	2-5
Involved In caregiving	4.16	4	2-5
Father rating	4.03	4	2.5-5
Hours worked per week	49.26	47.5	40-65
Hours spent with child on workday	3.30	3.21	1-9
Partner hours worked per week	36.22	40	0-60+
Years married	4.98	5	1-9



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