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LABOR

Stay-at-Home Dads Will Never Become the Norm

Despite a new awareness about full-time fathers, their numbers are still too minuscule to change society

By [Peggy Drexler](#) @drpeggydrexler | Aug. 21, 2013 | [28 Comments](#)

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The endless debate about “work-life balance” often contains a hopeful footnote about stay-at-home dads. If American society and business won’t make it easier on future female leaders who choose to have children, there is still the ray of hope that increasing numbers of full-time fathers will. But based on today’s socioeconomic trends, this hope is, unfortunately, misguided.



Getty Images

Certainly, there is more awareness of the phenomenon of the stay-at-home dad. They have their own reality show: *Modern Dads*, which debuts tonight on AMC, about “a tribe of suburban child-rearing dudes who are just trying to do their thing.” And it’s true that men who have left work to do their thing as full-time parents has doubled in a decade, but the numbers are still minuscule: only 180,000, [according to Census data](#), which University of Maryland Sociologist Philip N. Cohen [calculates](#) is only 0.8% of married couples where the stay-at-home father was out of the labor force for a year. Even that percentage is likely inflated by men thrust into their caretaker role by a downsizing. This is simply not a large enough cohort to reduce the social stigma and force other adjustments necessary to supporting men in this decision, even if only for a relatively short time.

(MORE: [Marissa Mayer](#), [Fashion Plate](#))

Even shorter times away from work for working fathers are already difficult — and still unusual. A [study](#) by Boston College’s Center for Work and Family found that 85% of new fathers take some time off after the birth of a child — but for all but a few, it’s a week or two at most. Meanwhile, Women’s Health USA [reports](#) that the average for women who take leave is more than 10 weeks. While the Family and Medical Leave Act passed in 1993 guarantees 12 weeks (for companies over 50 employees) of unpaid leave around the birth of a child, Institute for Women’s Policy Research [reports](#) that only 10% of private-sector employers offer access to paid parental leave.

Regardless of policy, such choices impact who moves up in the organization. Said one father I interviewed: “While you’re away, someone else is doing your work, making your sales, taking care of your customers. That can’t help you at work. It can only hurt you.” Women, of course, face the same issues of returning after a prolonged absence. But with many more women than men choosing to leave the workforce entirely to raise families, returning from an extended parental leave doesn’t raise as many eyebrows as it does for men. And the penalties can be stiffer, economically speaking. Men still earn more than women. Some of that discrepancy is because more women enter low-paying fields such as teaching, social work and nursing, in part because these fields tend to be more family-

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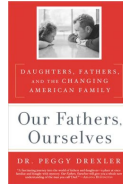
All of these issues are intertwined. Women would make more if they didn't break their earning trajectory by leaving the workforce, or if higher-paying professions were more family-friendly. Men wouldn't face the often unwritten penalties of extended paternal leaves from their [jobs](#) if new fathers stood up en masse and demanded it. Right now, momentum toward that rebalancing is pushing against a century of expectation that began when the Industrial Revolution sent men off to work while women stayed home.

Until that very distant and unlikely turning point, stay-at-home fathers may make all the difference for individual families, but their presence won't make a dent in the numbers of high-potential women who are forced to choose between family and career.



Peggy Drexler @drpeggydrexler

Peggy Drexler, Ph.D. is a research psychologist, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Weill Medical College, Cornell University, and author of *Our Fathers, Ourselves: Daughters, Fathers, and the Changing American Family*. The views expressed are solely her own.



Drexler's latest book is *Our Fathers, Ourselves: Daughters, Fathers, and the Changing American Family*

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Ideation

The fact is that the average male has 4 billion more brain cells than the average woman, which is why there will never be a female Einstein or any inventors that we can think of.....(New York Times Dec 1997).

This is the real reason females can never equal men in high paying jobs - they are already overcompensated because of quota's and government regulations, contracting preferences, diversity rules, college quotas etc etc....

Its not a good way to move our economy forward by overpromoting a gender!



TravisMullins

Great read <http://onlinepaysurveysdaily.us>



koreytroyer

It's possible to work from home and watch the kids. You just need to be organized and take Parkinson's Law very seriously. Get a schedule in order and stick to it as much as possible. Examples can be seen at www.daddycrashandburn.com



ChadWelch

By the way, I think a better number to consider is the Census numbers on dads that are "a regular source of care for their children under age 15." This number went from 26% in 2002 to 32% in 2011.



TonyHernandez

This opinion piece misses the real contribution of a full time Dad. Many studies have proven the importance of an engaged Dad in the social development of children. The lack of a supportive full time parent in our youth's lives can be seen in demographics like; the incarnation rate, teenage pregnancy, drug addiction and a whole host of societal problems. Raising a child is a full time contact sport. Traditionally; Moms, Aunts and Grandmothers provided this moderating force in our youth's lives while Dads were out "earning a living". I am a late 40's Dad with advanced degrees and past professional advancement. My worth is not tied to the number of degrees earned, dollars contributed to my family or if I am on the vanguard of a social movement. When I left the "working world" to be a full time Dad to my son, I became the one thing my family needed most - the constant moderating force that holds our family together. By becoming the full time adult at home, my life has become increasingly enriched. I do not have to plan weeks or months in advance to schedule time to be with my son for a special occasion. We have a constant stream of special moments and days. My life has given me the opportunity to serve both my church and society in positions of responsibility. Experiences and responsibilities I would not have had the opportunity to assume had I continued in my traditional role as "bread winner". The real and lasting impact my life has made is the opportunities my family enjoys because I was selfless enough to assume my new life as a full time Dad. It is a decision that I do not regret. While the absolute contribution of men becoming full time Dads may never become a measurable quantity, I make a real difference in the lives I support and the organizations I give my "free time" to. By stepping into my role as full time Dad, I have been forever enriched.



PapaFoote

I am known as the "Old Mountain Goat" - living with my family, including my 9 year old granddaughter! Often, "we" are needing to help ourselves, when "their" parents are not here! I like helping her, if she needs it - and visa versus! It is good to "bond" during this time in our lives!

Perhaps, more "grandparents" will find out that the "family" needs "more" folks to stay around during their own, older lives!



ChaseRoper

After I wrote an article for the Today show website about being a Sahd and using Pinterest, I got a ton of amazing (stupid) comments and feedback from brilliant (ignorant) internet users like some of the ones featured here. You guys give me hope in humanity.



Dad-On-The-Run

Stay home and heavily involved fathers are not a miniscule group. As others pointed out the census numbers

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are pointless. I filed a W-9 to get paid for some sponsored content this year. I won't be a male out of work for the year (and thus not an SAHD I guess). 200 dollars in the bank and I'm a working Dad now, woohoo!

Also, social change has little to do with the size of the population in question. It's the greater society's view on that population that matters more and I would say SAHD's have been opening eyes and winning hearts at a pretty good pace for the past few years.

One other thing you seem to be underestimating is the children we SAHD are raising. Mine are going to rule the world and I'm pretty sure they are going to be open and supportive to changes that are pro-family/work balance and partial to SAHD's. Since a lot of SAHD's have more than one child, I think the Dad/Mom and our kids (plus our parents/friends/siblings) make a pretty formidable segment of the population anyway. SAHD may never be the "norm" but it is already becoming "normal" employers and advertisers would do well to recognize that.

P.S. the gender box BS and blatant racism in these comments are sickening.



LarryBrown14

Jack. I agree that Cheryl's posting is great... last friday I got Mercedes-Benz S-class since I been making \$6903 this past four weeks an would you believe 10-k lass month. this is actually the nicest-job I have ever done. I actually started 6 months ago and pretty much immediately was bringin in at least \$71, per-hour. I use the details here, www.pro67.co.uk



DesignerDaddy

The show is on A&E, not AMC. Fact check much?



ChadWelch

While I agree that at-home dads will likely never be the norm that doesn't mean they don't have an impact on society. I think at some point there won't be a "norm." To me that means opening it up for families to make the best decisions as to what works for them free from gender stereotyping.

I would also note that the Census numbers are a really bad measure of at-home dads. I have been an at-home dad for nearly 13 years but I am not counted by the census because I make \$100 a month or so maintaining a website. I spend less than 4 hours a month on this but it disqualifies me, under the census, as being listed as an at-home dad.



Lola_Rolla

In my opinion the benefit of it becoming a norm is that couples would become more free to decide what works best for them.

Rather than being dictated to by a patriarchal society, in which on the whole women are expected to be stay at home mothers, to give up their careers and thus becoming dependent on the male partners income to provide for his family. Even if the father wants to stay at home, as discussed in the article above, would it make financial sense?

Personally I would not want to give up that time with my children and I feel that raising children is higher on the priorities list than advancing my career. Is that my maternal instinct? Or is it that not conforming to this stay at home mother ideal, would leave me shunned in my social environment? Yes to both probably.

Although, believe me, I plan to do both I want children and a career. Although I do realise by taking that career break I may never reach the highest career goals that I might off if my husband were to raise the children.

Although for couples who adopt to have a stay at home father over the mother, I could bet ya that the mother would have to put up with pressure and attitudes negatively assuming she is cold, uncaring, selfish 'not a proper mother'. The father would likely be de masculinised' to a certain point, for taking on a 'womens role'.

Until these gender stereotypes are challenged, I fear that stay at home dads will not become the norm - they will not become accepted as your average functional family dynamic.

And with all mindsets that need broadening, is the place to start on that education?



Elvisofana

Why should it become a "norm" ? Let all couples decide by themselves what works best. There should not be any "norm" about who stays at home or if someone stays at home. I always get irritated when people automatically link getting a job with more responsibility and more money (and more work and more time away from home !) as "moving up". Earning more money or having a nicer title on your business card has nothing to do with moving up in life. Choosing to stay home and make do with less money, but with more family time can also be "moving up". To me, taking care of your family and focussing on life, without selling it to the highest bidder who can lure you with dollars and fancy job titles, can be the highest life goal one could wish for.



Openminded1

The Bs is they show a black man staying home with his baby, he maybe staying home while the good woman is out working two jobs , but he is not watching the baby his mother is or is grandma is.. a lot of men today are great dads and stay at home for many reasons , but black men rarely are stay at home dads actually taking care of the babies.

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www.Grammarly.com/Grammar_Checker

**edlf**

Stay-at-home Dads have at least one thing in common: they enjoy wearing aprons and enjoy dusting, especially the watching of TV during the day until the family manager returns home from work. By then he will have a delicious meal prepared for his working spouse. What a life!

**joelp77440**

The continued neuterization of men.

**OhMyDog**

Never say never.

**SusieK**

@TonyHernandez Thank you for this well thought out response Tony! I often wonder at the vitriolic responses this topic brings out! I would hope that when our time comes to care for children BOTH of us will consider it a joy to stay at home for however long it feels right. I saw this and thought it embodied that sense of fun and happiness that seems to be missing from a lot of these "stay at home dads" pieces! <http://www.ozy.com/c-notes/a-moms-take/2699.article>

**StahbaKing**

@Lola_Rolla <http://www.youtube.com/user/stahba>

Challenge accepted

**StahbaKing**

@Openminded1 Wow...just...wow..

**buffalo.barnes102****@dakinsky**

I'm a 66 year old man and I agree with you completely. What a bunch of politically correct/ spineless/ androgynous/ weak-kneed/ metrosexual/ "I wrote a song about it", c*nts people in general, and men in particular, have become. Articles in ESQUIRE titled "How to be a Man" that tell elfin-looking men-boys how and when to wear "jeans" and "sneakers". Man Up!

**phoenix1920**

@joelp77440 Interesting choice of words as the article has everything to do with men who actually can produce children and then raise them--it seems like these men are the only group who have proven themselves as the opposite. The very concept of men leaving the home to go to a "job" is a rather new concept, historically speaking--only about 200 years in the past 200,000 years of modern man. When our country was founded, excluding servants, the most men and families worked together in the family business and often the home and the business were in the same dwelling, excluding family farms. The entire family helped run and worked for their family business. Only during the industrial revolution did this change, but in the beginning, even children were used as labor for factories, coal, etc. It sounds like you are thinking only of the "Leave it to Beaver" days, which is a blip in our history.

**Openminded1**

@StahbaKing @Openminded1 Wow to you too SK just plain wow.

**trevortrevors29**

" man up " ? I served my country in 2 wars / worked my a\$\$ off in a steel mill for years till my back was destroyed .. We mutually decided I would stay home to raise our son and somehow that makes me less of a man than you ? If anything that makes me more of a man to decide to be there for my son and be the father I never had .. The problem with society today is there are not enough MEN stepping up and being fathers .. You sir are a complete dipsh_t / I usually respect my elders but when garbage like this comes out of your mouth I find it hard -

**atroyfoster**

@buffalo.barnes102 @dakinsky \Funny you took time to read an Esquire article.....! I'm gay and I don't even read that nelly crap.

**Openminded1**

@phoenix1920 @joelp77440 not to mention not real. leave it to beaver with dad at the table in his jacket and mom wearing pearls what a joke.

**StahbaKing**



@trevortrevors29 Would you mind if I featured this statement on my youtube channel? Stay At Home BadAss. <http://www.youtube.com/user/stahba>



buffalo.barnes102

@atrofoster @buffalo.barnes102 @dakinsky

Why do you find that "funny"? Reading Esquire is like visiting an alien world of people that have never been west of the Hudson River.

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