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Stay-at-Home Fathers: What Is Their Life Really Like? An Intimate Portrayal

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**STAY-AT-HOME FATHERS: WHAT IS THEIR LIFE LIKE? AN INTIMATE
PORTRAYAL**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Early Childhood and Family Development

By

Christi Ann Hosking

May 2022

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STAY-AT-HOME FATHERS: WHAT IS THEIR LIFE LIKE? AN INTIMATE PORTRAYAL

Childhood Education and Family Development

Missouri State University, May 2022

Master of Science

Christi Ann Hosking

ABSTRACT

Reinforced by years of gender stereotypes is modern societies' definition of masculinity, which has long been characterized by breadwinning and providing. Current literature has observed the growing trend which finds an increasing number of men engaged in the role of caregiver and the dynamic change in the home-work balance. Only a few studies looked at what life is like for a stay-at-home father and even fewer have allowed these fathers a unique voice for sharing their story. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of what day to day life was really like as a stay-at-home father. In a sense we aimed to adjust the current gender role stereotypes, through this intimate portrayal of one courageous father who chose a nurturing caregiving role instead of following societies' definition of what a strong masculine provider looked like. This research study provided an authentic window into the realities faced by one stay-at-home father in today's society. This study describes certain themes which emerged throughout, including the participant's perception of his role as caregiver where he found greater fulfillment than his career, the fulfillment he found with his connection to his daughters, and finally he found the essence of meaning for his life, his self-esteem and his identity through being a stay-at-home dad. This research concluded for one stay-at-home father, a greater meaning for his life, a stronger bond with his daughters and an overall sense that he was paving the way for other men regarding a softer, nurturing side of masculinity.

KEYWORDS: gender, masculinity, caregiving, stay-at-home fathers, fatherhood, gender roles, stereotypes, breadwinners, societal norms

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May 2022

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to Dr. David Goodwin, and to the faculty of the Early Childhood and Family Development program including Dr. Joan Test, and Dr. Elizabeth King.

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OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Society's long-standing acceptance of gender stereotypes, defined as a fixed and oversimplified idea of a type of person and the social constructs for what defines masculinity and femininity, have remained largely unchanged for centuries; some recent trends show movement towards a more equalitarian view of men's and women's roles (Zimmerman, 2000). Fathers in most recent decades were considered the providers and breadwinners for their families; success was defined by their career status outside the home. Ross (2013) noted that "fatherhood was disproportionately and represented as primarily not caring for children directly but providing for them" (p.1). Today's father faces not only the pressure to provide as societal standards dictate but also to take a more hands-on, active role in nurturing and caregiving. What about those fathers who break the mold completely and choose the role of primary caregiver comprising the growing population of stay-at-home fathers? Lee and Lee's, (2018) study shed light on the growing trend of fathers' increased involvement; where many other studies concentrated on the division of work-family balance, utilizing quantitative methods (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Lamb, 1986; Latshaw & Hale, 2016; Rochlen et al., 2008; Tichenor et al., 2011; Way, 2010; West et al., 2009). Zimmerman (2000) looked at the difference in marital equality between stay-at-home mother and stay-at-home father households where he concluded that the balance of power weighed more heavily on the partner with the greater earning potential. Lee and Lee (2018) considered the way society was structured and also factors that influence culture that contribute to the gender specific work family balance, reflected in policies and the income gaps between genders. This aligned with the traditional role of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners. Similarly, Latshaw and Hale (2016) looked at the domestic hand-off that occurred when

breadwinning women returned home that they quickly “shifted or swapped their domestic responsibilities, including childcare” (p.116) during nonworking hours and on weekends. Solomon’s (2014) quantitative study shed light on the stay-at-home father; looking at the media trends and reasons men stated for becoming primary caregivers. A more recent study also considered the reasons men became stay-at-home fathers and reflected on the continued stigma these men experience as they enter a caregiving role (Holmes & Huston, 2021). These studies provided a quantitative look at the work family balance, the reasons men choose a primary giving role and a look into traditional gender roles but none of them offered an intimate look, via portraiture, into the daily life of the stay-at-home father and the meaning that this experience had on their life.

In their qualitative study, Rochlen et al. (2008) looked more closely at the stay-at-home father’s decisions to become primary caregivers; this study and Doucet’s (2006) study on stay-at-home father’s role identity are currently the few that have touched on the broader topic of work-family balance in this domain. The absence of contemporary research portraying the daily life and philosophical meaning of men as stay-at-home fathers is where this study begins. Through the lens of Jungian theory and the essence of symbolic interactionism this study takes an intimate look at what it’s really like for these men that have become the primary caregivers for their children. Whether by choice, financial circumstances or agreement within their relational dynamic, more men are choosing to stay-at-home than ever before. The significance of these fathers’ involvement with their children cannot be overlooked; they deserve their voice to be heard as their numbers grow. Not only is it important to document the trend of stay-at-home fathers through data and quantitative study; but more importantly to move beyond the statistics providing the observations, dialog, and narratives of the men who live it every day.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, society has typically portrayed men as the strong, breadwinning, masculine pillar of the family; the provider of financial stability, discipline and structure, rarely engaging in the day to day nurturing of children (De Frain, 1977; Eagly et al., 2020). Research studying men's role as father in a nurturing or caregiving sense has until recently only scratched the surface of this phenomenon. While contemporary research has begun to acknowledge father's increased role within the work-family division of labor (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2000; Chesley & Flood, 2017; Latshaw & Hale, 2016; Zimmerman, 2000), only a few studies have focused on fathers as primary caregivers (West et al., 2009). Scarcer still are those studies that look into the intimate lives of these fathers that choose to stay-at-home, where is their voice in current research? What matters to these men? What is it really like to enter the estrogen filled world of primary caregiving? As more men are choosing to step out of gender stereotyped masculine roles, and enter a world typically assigned to women, they are faced with unique challenges, criticism, and the core of their masculinity is at question. Shirani et al. (2012) suggested that providing is no longer the sole responsibility of women in society, but stigmas still abound as people question why these men are not at work.

This study focused on the unique experiences that one man faced as he entered the characteristically female world of primary caregiving. It offered a glimpse into his life of as a stay-at-home father, and focused on what is important to him, what brought him to his decision to become a primary caregiver and provided reason for the importance of a father's involvement in his children's lives. Most importantly it allowed this father to reflect on his unique experience and how it brought meaning to his life and his identity as a man. As society and our own personal expectations for men and women's gender roles change; we discovered that gender and

what determines masculinity and femininity may also need to be reevaluated as well. Doucet (2013) discovered that the embodiment of men as caregivers is missing from current literature, and she touched upon the need for asking old questions in new ways. Not only studying primary caregiving as a women's role, but its importance for men as fathers, not just nurturing as it relates to mothering, but studying fathering as a separate but equally important phenomenon. As more men forge new ground, turning away from societal stereotypes and enter the world of primary caregivers, documenting their voice is crucial. Through intimate narratives of struggle and triumph, this man is embracing the nurturing side of masculinity; his stories and those who are yet written are beginning to transform the narrowly defined male role stereotypes into one of equality and neutrality. More research is needed which provides a voice for these fathers, not only allowing for women rights to be acknowledged as stay-at-home caregivers but men as well. As more men are accepting a primary caregiving role, it's important to secure a platform where they can express what they are passionate about and acknowledge how they compare themselves to men in traditional breadwinning roles. Often a quiet minority but an ever increasing presence among play groups, parent groups and the daily routines of stay-at-home caregivers, the value and passion of these fathers must be evidenced in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide an intimate portrayal to offer a deeper understanding of the issues faced by a stay-at-home. This qualitative study used an analysis portraiture means to look into the life of one stay-at-home father, through phenomenological interviews, and dialogue with the researcher and close analysis of the narratives collected. In past studies, men's roles as caregivers have been looked at as trends and numbers; this study hopes to

provide a platform for discovery, an essence of the meaning of life for men's identity as they embark on a groundbreaking journey through the typically women-filled world of primary caregiving. This researcher offered one stay-at-home father his own voice, and a place to reflect on what is important to him and the meaning he found for his life by caregiving for his children. The content of this study gave evidence to what he found gratifying, the struggles he encountered along the way, and what led him to choose the role of primary caregiving for his children. He thought a lot about his role compared to other men in the corporate world where he used to work. But what the researcher discovered as the interview unfolded was what he valued most and the depth of meaning he gained from the experience beyond anything he had considered beforehand. The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological approach to the interview creating a portraiture of one father's life as a primary caregiver for his children. This study gave a deeper insight into the lives of stay-at-home fathers, not just from a research perspective, but also from the personal account of one father in particular and his day to day life; to tell his story, in hopes of understanding what embarking on this uncharted journey meant to him. The participant was selected from a pool of stay-at-home fathers who reside within the Clark County region. To be selected and meet the study criteria, this participant was in a committed partnership he worked less than 20 hours per week, he was the sole, primary caregiver for his children, and he was available for in-person interviews. Past research has looked at stay-at-home fathers' perceptions of their role (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006), the importance of father's involvement in their children's lives (Holmes & Huston, 2010), and the work-family division of labor (Latshaw & Hale, 2016; Zimmerman, 2000) but scant research exists which portrays the intimacies of the daily lives of fathers who stay-at-home.

Research Questions

The current study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What is the essence of caregiving and how does it relate to this father's sense of self?
- 2) Is this stay-at-home father's connection with his children strengthened while in a primary caregiving role?
- 3) How has the social connection for this man changed since staying at home? Did he face isolation and stigma from other men who work outside the home?
- 4) Does this father hold the same value for his success as a primary caregiver as he did in the corporate world?

As stay-at-home fathers, their role in society is groundbreaking and defies the stereotypes and social constructs which typically have defined masculinity, were there areas in their life that brought them to the decision to become a primary caregiver? Do they see themselves as consciously changing the stigmas and societal stereotypes for all men by providing fathering in a fulltime manner? The issues central to men as primary caregivers are not to be viewed as "mothers" but to see fathering in a whole new way. The defining role of fatherhood and the very essence of what it means to be male are evolving and the need for society's acceptance of stay-at-home fathers is just the beginning of this phenomenon. This research explored these central issues with an open unstructured interview platform with one male participant and discovered his life history and what ultimately contributed to his choice to become the primary caregiver for his children. What the research unexpectedly discovered was how enthralled the participant was to be given the opportunity to be heard and given a voice, unscripted and unedited into the meaning and experience of his role as dad.

Significance of the Study

The value of this research is to portray the life of the stay-at-home father, through a personal account of one father utilizing a portraiture style of interviewing, giving an intimate portrayal into how his experience gave meaning to his life and his identity. The purpose of this research was to give a voice stay-at-home fathers which could be used towards future research as more men enter this uncharted territory. Gathering this type of research is important for society to help understand the changing roles of men and the old stereotypes we once considered masculine and feminine. While we may realize the changing trend of men in our society, we lack the understanding of what this change has meant to so many men and how they are coping with it. We were able to gain a better understanding of what stay-at-home fathers find valuable and gratifying in the role which has typically been portrayed as feminine. As more fathers enter the primary caregiving role, this study helped provide clarity as to what brought this one man to his decision to become a primary caregiver for his children. Whether they came to this role due to circumstances beyond their control, or whether they chose the role out of a strong desire to nurture their children; his voice mattered as a voice for other men to feel empowered by their decision. This study began paving understanding for society to reconsider its rigid gender stereotypes and offers a way other men may find meaning in their life different than the traditional breadwinning role. For the current study, it is assumed that the participant answered truthfully to the best of their ability, and care was taken to process the research data in an unbiased manner, which reflects the summation of participant responses.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As our society moves away from gender stereotypes and typically defined roles for men and women, it allows for present and future generations to choose paths that were previously considered taboo. In the past, the structure of the predictably defined nuclear family, by which most of the literature accepted as “the standard” included a man and his wife, who performed separate but necessary tasks in support of the family structure. Normally this meant that men worked outside of the home as the “breadwinner” and women stayed at home as the housewife/mother. In 1960 only 6% of families were headed by females, compared with 24% in the late 1990’s (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2000; Eagly et al., 2020). According to U.S. Census data in the past 10 years the number of stay-at-home fathers has risen from 147,000 in 2000 to 214,000 in 2013 (census.gov 2013). As the trend continues towards fathers pursuing a more active caregiving role, social constructs of what once defined masculinity and success are fluctuating as well. This review of the literature examines past and present research on fatherhood, the importance of fatherhood on children’s development, the struggle of changing masculine roles and stereotypes in modern society, and the perceptions and attitudes of fathers in caregiving roles, leading to a better understanding of why more men are choosing to stay-at home. This review concludes with thoughts on the current trend of men as stay-at-home fathers, the lack of literature on this population and the need for studies which provide a voice to these men.

Fatherhood in Modern Society

Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda (2000) discuss fatherhood in the twenty-first century, where fatherhood was portrayed in a single-minded dimension and failed to recognize the multidimensional relationship between a father and child. Men's role as father has traditionally been one of provider and breadwinner, with little time spent in direct caregiving. Typically, fathers would engage in rough play, discipline and other fathering roles that were accepted as masculine. Gul and Uskul (2019) found that the perception of men's roles was driven by a phrase which they coined as "masculine honor" or that which is typically accepted as a male gender role (p.3) These perceptions also had an impact on how men's role as primary caregiver were perceived by their colleagues and peers (Gul & Uskul, 2019). Ross (2013) noted that family policy is still reflective of this breadwinner, 1950's nuclear family ideal where men worked, and women stayed home. As family policy evolves to reflect societal needs, and the changing dynamic of family structure and work-family labor division, the voice of the stay-at-home father cannot be understated. Hence the importance of a study which documents what stay-at-home fathers' value; these men who have put aside societal pressures of gender conformity and instead have pushed the envelope of what was once considered typical masculine and roles. Present day society is witnessing the rapidly changing structure and function of family life which has led to different expectations and beliefs about the roles of fathers. Shirani et al. (2012) suggest that these changes may be more evident at the cultural rather than the performance level, citing that the majority of first-time fathers' place heavy value on their paid "working" identity. Although within this paradigm it is argued that "providing is no longer the sole preserve of men" (Shirani et al., 2012, p.2) and that fatherhood attitudes extend beyond the financial provisions and into the realm of active caregiving. According to Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda (2000) father

involvement and responsibility in caregiving will likely increase as men become a more integral part of child rearing and domestic activities.

Fathers' Involvement, Child Development and Perspective

Intuitively it would be expected that the increased involvement of fathers would be beneficial to child development. There is evidence that indicates a positive correlation between father involvement and healthier child development. Lamb (1986) suggested that although it is often neglected in survey studies, paternal responsibility may be the most important factor of father involvement. Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda (2000) also noted that the most positive effects of paternal involvement occurred when the father was supportive. Emotional connectedness, strong attachment, and financial support are all associated with healthy developmental outcomes in children. Sarkadi et al. (2008) described results consistent with this premise; noting decreased behavioral issues in adolescence, better educational outcomes and healthier social skills for those children whose fathers were engaged. Research in the area of father's warmth and sensitivity is limited but suggests that involved, nurturing fathers have a positive impact on their children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Holmes & Huston, 2010; Webster et al., 2013).

Tichenor et al. (2011) found that most men rated the role of fatherhood as important or very important. Some men may face higher expectations for greater involvement in parenting and household labor; providing was still important when considering men's overall identity as father. Tichenor et al. (2011) concluded that fatherhood was as important, and in most cases more important to men than their work, career or leisure; perhaps this attitude has influenced and given reason for the continued trend of fathers increased role as caregiver. Parenting is still significantly asymmetrical in terms of men and women, where it is often assumed that women

are considered primary caregivers compared to men. As the changing tides of fatherhood's definition evolves, one wonders if society and the social standards that have defined masculinity will also progress towards a more equalitarian view on parenting.

The Changing Role of Fathers

Holmes and Huston (2010) reasoned that there is a complex mix of factors both inside and outside the home which affect a father's willingness to become involved. Major influences on a father's resolve to engage with their child include: their own perception of traditional childrearing practices, unemployment, and maternal employment outside the home. Doucet and Merla (2007) found that men, who were primary caregiving fathers, felt guilty about not providing financial support to their family. This conflict between breadwinning and caregiving contrasts with the steadily rising numbers of men who are choosing to become primary caregivers. It may be that as social constructs change for men's roles, that men will feel their position as primary caregiver is just as important as the male who provides income for his family. Doucet (2013) suggests that care work is often under-valued in modern society, and only sometimes recognized as a skill. She went on to explain that men and women face immense social pressure to conform to societal expectations of gender and gender roles. These expectations intertwine gender, paid work and the essence of caregiving. Men often face suspicion and scrutiny as they navigate through community settings such as parks and schoolyards (Doucet, 2013). This subtle discomfort is often felt by fathers as they enter female-dominated child-rearing venues such as infant play groups. Fathers often discuss the masculine side of caregiving as they describe their playful interactions with their infants, and their involvement in their child's sports activities. Doucet and Merla (2007) found that men who were

primary caregiving fathers felt guilty about not providing financial support to their family. This also aligns with Ross' (2013) assertion of societies' view of men's roles as breadwinner and has subsequently contributed to the reluctance of more men to engage in primary caregiving roles. Solomon (2014) noted that the continued idealization of the mother-child relationship often men felt that others viewed them as incompetent parents compared to their wives. With the recent economic downturn, many men became more involved in caregiving as they lost their jobs and experienced extended periods of unemployment. West et al. (2009) described father's unemployment or unpleasant work environment as another reason they took on a primary caregiving role. Although cited to a lesser degree than the desire of their spouse to enhance their career, it's still statistically significant overall.

Primary Reasons Men become Primary Caregivers

According to Fischer and Anderson (2012) women made up 47% of the workforce. In 2020, according to government statistics on labor, 57% of women were in the workforce; during these hours, fathers must engage in paternal caregiving, but most work full-time as well (dol.gov, 2020). A small portion of these are stay-at-home fathers, with no other full-time job and others are "forced" into the position due to unemployment. According to Rochlen et al. (2008) there are three primary reasons men become stay-at-home fathers: by choice, spouse/partner has a higher income with better benefits, and unemployment during economic downturns. For those that have a choice, the most important reason for staying at home is the desire to be the primary caregiver. For many it's a chance to have a closer relationship with their children; more than just financial support and be involved in their day to day lives. West et al. (2009) looked at father's reasons for becoming primary caregivers of their infants. Historical reasons included how they were treated

by their own parents and whether they were avoiding what was done to them or patterned themselves after their parent's example. Enjoyment and confidence in their role as a father were other reasons given for why men chose to stay home as primary caregivers. Some fathers chose to stay at home based on their desire to nurture and make a difference in their children's lives. Another major reason given was their significant other had a higher salary and economically it made more sense. The recent economic downturn saw many men and women becoming unemployed for an extended period. Often these couples were faced with tough decisions when it came to affording childcare; in many cases when one partner found work the other would stay at home. Current literature is mixed as to the trend towards men's reasons for becoming primary caregivers. West et al. (2009) concluded as the earning potential between genders narrows and fathers find increased enjoyment in caregiving, there will be more fathers taking on a primary caregiving role.

The Evolving State of Masculinity and Societal Norms

Are today's men stepping away from typical gender stereotypes by becoming caregivers, not only as a secondary role, but as a primary career as well? The literature in this review suggests that this may be true. Jung posited that there are three main parts to our personality; each archetype plays a role in our identity; both within ourselves and how we are perceived by others. Adamski (2011), defines an archetype as the common heritage of mankind, which determines human behavior and can also transform human personality. The persona is the outer layer that is seen by others and adjusts to the standards, social values and behavior patterns that we face throughout life. It drives each individual to adapt to society, and according to Jung often dictates socially acceptable behaviors (Adamski 2011). Literature has often looked at typical

social constructs for what has defined masculinity and success. The concept of social constructs or how we look at gendered roles are what Snitker (2018) referred to as “traditional notions” (p.204). Snitker (2018) looked specifically at “gendered caregiving roles and the gendered assumptions about parenting” (p.204) where she noted that although fathers were staying at home, their role of caregiver looked at fatherhood through a masculine providing lens instead of the traditional definition of the stay-at-home mother. These societal pressures have often been the driving force for men’s continued tradition as strong providers, “breadwinners”, often distant from primary caregiving roles. Snitker (2018) posited that the “constructions of gender and gender practices were subject to change” (p. 204) But what for the concept of men embracing that which has long been associated with femininity? Adamski (2011) continued to explain that Jung’s theory on personality has two other dimensions which may lend explanation to this trend. Jung believed that each person, whether male or female, possessed an element of the opposite sex within them. He believed males possessed a feminine side and females equally possessed the propensity for masculinity. The archetype of a woman within a man is referred to as the anima and the archetype of a man within a woman is called the animus. Jung’s research may help to explain the way in which stay-at-home fathers are able to embrace the more feminine attributes of caregiving and nurturing. As the pressure from society lessens and there is a promoted tolerance for gender neutrality, the possibility exists for more fathers adopting the role of primary caregiver.

Embodiment of Men and Male Gender Roles

Doucet’s (2006) groundbreaking research began to look at the embodiment of men as primary caregivers; she noted that past research was primarily focused on men as breadwinners

and the “estrogen-filled world” of female primary caregivers. Her more recent research has focused on fathers as primary caregivers, and the importance of looking at men in a multidimensional lens. To look beyond the expectations of masculinity once defined by the ability to provide financially to his family, to choose careers that were typically male, to climb the corporate ladder and define success by his work outside the home. Modern day men such as stay-at-home fathers are breaking these stereotypes and embarking on new ground, engaging in roles that were typically deemed feminine. As quoted by Way (2010) “Doucet (2013) concluded that men father, and in the process of fathering they redefine masculinity” (p. 104), she goes on to explain that gradually a change occurs to the typical norms that “men internalize as a standard for construction of their own identities.” Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda (2000) began to focus on this narrow-mindedness that was present in literature as well. That somehow in the past gender roles were so specific and followed such strict guidelines that any deviation from the societal expectation was seen as deviate or unacceptable. This perspective is apparent as men describe their role as primary caregiver; when asked many men still focus on their lack of providing financially, the “play” aspects of interaction with their children and their awkward interactions within the parenting community (Doucet, 2013; Shirani et al., 2012). It’s almost as if stay-at-home fathers still see themselves through the eyes of the social constructs they are indoctrinated with from birth; that men provide, and women nurture. As Doucet (2006) explains, this powerful change in our perception of the embodiment of caregiving is almost exclusively the common theme among researchers has been the missing studies on fathers themselves, not defined by the women breadwinners, but as they see themselves in modern day society.

Trends: Fathers as Caregivers

A limited but focused amount of research has been conducted which addresses the trend towards fathers as caregivers. Most of the literature and study has revolved around the work/domestic division of labor, men's changing gender role identity and breadwinning versus caregiving and men's perception of caregiving vs success at work. Although the literature seems consistent in providing evidence towards the trend of fathers engaging more in caregiving, there is a considerable lack of data on the actual feelings men have towards their role as primary caregivers for their children. What value do men put on their role as stay-at-home father? How are men talking about this new trend and where do we go from here with our studies on fathers who are choosing to stay at home? While the literature includes data for the reasons fathers stay at home, there is little data which looks at the intimate thoughts and feelings of these fathers, their voice in society, who they are and the impact they are making in the lives of their children. As Solomon (2014) found, some father's felt like "rock stars" as they guided and nurtured their children full time. They considered their job as primary caregiver to be equally important as that of breadwinner. Others had a more ambiguous definition of their life as primary caregiver, citing anguish and guilt over not providing financially and the stigma of being male in a primarily female dominated world (Doucet, 2006; Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Shirani et al., 2012). As society's perspective of caregiving changes, and the position of caregiver is looked upon as important, so may men value their role as primary caregiver for their children, without as much hesitation.

Summary

After reviewing current literature, the research concluded that more research was needed to look deeper into the role of fathers as primary caregivers. Of particular importance is offering

a place for this significant part of our population to be heard, recognized, and given the voice that has been overlooked by the literature and given mostly to women. Not only must future studies recognize the importance of men as primary caregivers, but we are obligated to define the stay-at-home father's experience as unique and not in comparison to women. They must be given their own voice, exclusive of the role of mother, and instead provide an embodied presence for men as caregivers, as they redefine masculinity, fatherhood and shape their own identity. A simple search will find the definition of fatherhood as the qualities or spirit of the father. As we look at the role of one stay-at-home father, we must wonder what defines the spirit of their experience? Research has often looked at the phenomenon itself, but current literature has neglected their story; the voice of men as primary givers, their role, what they value, what they hold dear, and how they view themselves in society: What is their life really like? As more men enter the world of stay-at-home fatherhood, providing a voice for these fathers will provide a place where the social constructs of gender and masculinity are redefined.

METHODOLOGY

Society's acceptance for stereotypical gender roles, and that which defines masculinity and femininity, is the backdrop for this current research study on fatherhood. Where once the roles were clearly defined and the social constructs for what paths men and women should follow were distinct, the gender lines are now cloudy. These same social constructs considered men as the primary breadwinners, and women as the nurturer, housewife. With so many women entering the workforce, and the work-family division of labor becomes more balanced, so does the advent of more fathers staying at home full time to raise their children. How do these fathers define meaning for their role as caregivers?

Although current research has reflected on the phenomenon of women returning to work in record numbers, and the fact that work-family labor is more equalitarian (Lee & Lee, 2018; Solomon, 2014; West et al., 2009; Zimmerman, 2000); much is still left to learn about the day to day lives of stay-at-home fathers. The men who decide to breach societal and social expectations of masculinity are breaking new ground into what it really means to be a father; how one fathers in the twenty-first century. As we embark on this uncharted journey, learning more about the intimacies of the stay-at-home father, we may well learn about what fathers hold dear, how they are facilitating the falling of the curtain on gender role stereotypes, and providing a glimpse into this current phenomenon of fathers becoming primary caregivers. As we progress on this journey of discovery with each of these participants, the researcher hopes to discover an in-depth exploration of how one father finds the essence of meaning for their life as primary caregivers. Did his life become more meaningful as he got deeper into his role as daddy and where would he describe his success now as his role pivoted?

While the literature looks mostly at a quantitative perspective of stay-at-home fathering, current research briefly glazes the surface of the perspectives and lives of these “new” men (Doucet, 2006; Rochlen et al., 2008). Doucet (2006) began to look at the intimacies of the lives of these men, at the reasons for why they became stay-at-home fathers, what they have found difficult and how they see their roles compared to those who have out of home careers. For the purpose of this study, a stay-at-home father is defined someone who is biologically male, their sex assigned at birth, who provides greater than fifty percent of the care for their child/ren and who works less than twenty hours a week. Although Doucet’s (2006) study began the quest of describing fathering through the eyes of men, and not as it is compared to the role of mothering, very few other studies have provided insight into the lens of the daily life, joys and struggles of stay-at-home fathers.

The purpose of this study was to listen to the intimate narrative of the experiences of one man as he embarked on the role defining decision of being a stay-at-home father. This study describes what is important in this man, and offered him a unique voice amongst a once estrogen filled world. What does this man hold as meaningful? Does he find the essence of meaning as he has in the workplace? Does he feel fulfilled through the act of primary caregiving? This study describes the one moment when the participant looked at his life and realized how much their new identity as caregiver brought meaning to his life.

The research used a qualitative portraiture design, which looked at the life of one stay-at-home father. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which governs the safe, ethical adherence to strict research protocol and assures the safety of all study participants. This study pertains to IRB approval number IRB-FY2019-160 with initial approval on March 24, 2019, and renewal on February 9, 2022, see Appendix A. The participant was

selected after he responded to an advertisement posted on Facebook. The participant met the criteria for the study by being in a committed live-in relationship; he worked less than 20 hours per week, and he was the primary caregiver for his children. As the interview progressed it became obvious that the path to discovering the meaning for this father's experience was by attaining what Witz et al. (2001) called the "essence of the phenomenon" (p.198). A way of interviewing where the participant steers the conversation where it has the greatest meaning for them and their unique experience. By allowing the free expression of feelings and storytelling without interference from the researcher, the participant was able to deeply and more meaningfully present his experience as a stay-at-home dad to his children. While some research showed the significance of this trend, it has rarely offered these fathers a personal place for testimony as to their experience, how they felt and what was important to them. Because this study looked at feelings, experiences, and the overall essence of meaning; a qualitative, portraiture design was most valuable. The study allowed the participant a place to reflect on his personal experience of caregiving unhindered by interruptions and the constant questioning by the researcher.

Participants

The participant (hereafter referred to as TM) was selected through bulletins posted on social media, a Facebook post with a call for participants; the main participant resided in the Portland, Oregon area and was selected based on matching the criteria for the study. Portland is a thriving metropolis with a population of 609,456 with approximately 158,000 households; of those only a small percentage are male householders (U.S. Census Bureau; 2013). The chosen participant was eligible for the study because he was in a committed relationship, he did not

work outside the home, and he was the primary care provider for his children while he wife was at work. Primary caregiving consisted of weekdays during work hours, after work hours when travel for GM was involved, cooking and housecleaning and attending school functions and field trips. The participant contacted the researcher through Facebook messenger to confirm his interest in being part of the study. We discussed the time requirements, the need for signed informed consent before the interview and we scheduled a day to meet. The participant is a 55 year old Caucasian man who is married to GM, he has 2 daughters ages 28 and 30, with upper level income living in the Portland Oregon suburbs.

Procedure

This study used a qualitative, portraiture design, utilizing a semi-structured interview format with one participant see Appendix B for a list of probing questions. Additional clarifying and probing questions were asked during the interview, for example: When you met with other couples and the guys after you left your career, did you find there was a difference in the way that you interacted with them or that they acted different towards you?, How did the moms at the coffee meetings take having guy energy in their female circle?, and What do you think about, or did you consider society's view of men, and how your choice to stay home may impact that view compared to when you were the breadwinner?

This methodology looked beyond the subjective experience and utilized empathy and sympathy to understand the phenomenon felt by the participant (Witz, 2006). As part of the larger unity of this participant's experience this study created an intimate portrait gaining insight into the motivations, feelings and deeper meaning of one stay-at-home father. Given the study size the interview focused on the essence of meaning, a phenomenological approach to this

portraiture research which was a suitable choice for this research design. This study's design was so eloquently stated by Urcia (2021) that phenomenology provides a path to deeper understanding which is "based on the inner essence and structure of a participants' lived experiences" (p.1). Utilizing a phenomenological approach, the researcher aims "to capture experience in its primordial origin or essence, without interpreting, explaining, or theorizing" (van Manen, 2017, p. 775). Many quantitative studies have looked at the numbers, and statistical data of the phenomenon of more fathers staying at home; but few have provided a voice for these men to be heard. After reading much of the literature, it was determined that a portraiture design with a phenomenological lens would fit the parameters of this study and guide the research towards the answers which it seeks. Doucet's (2006) study of men as caregivers, and their lives navigating through and estrogen-filled world, began to look at the stay-at-home father with a fresh, new perspective. Realizing that men were not just mothering their children, or doing women's work, they were fathering, and it was important for further research to approach the topic from this angle.

This study aligns with the philosophies of symbolic interactionism theory described by Jeon (2004) which looks at the process by which meaning is developed and the "nature of interactions that are represented between human beings" (p. 250); the meanings must be interpreted to be understood. As a basis for the explanations of the interview material; the data was analyzed with this perspective in mind. As stay-at-home fathers tread into uncharted territory, and the meaning and identity of who they are as a man is challenged and rewritten; how do they perceive themselves and their new role? As the symbolic definition for what once was considered a feminine role is confronted and redefined by more men; so too does the interpretation by scholars of what is masculine.

The date approached and the participant decided to meet at a coffee shop to commence the interview. The participant and the researcher sat at a table, away from other patrons so there was more privacy which allowed for the participant to feel comfortable sharing his story. The researcher explained that the study was given approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A) and that every precaution to limit harm was taken. Informed consent was read, the researcher asked the participant if he had any questions or concerns, and the document was signed by both the researcher and the participant. The researcher discussed the use of a recording device to document the interview and it would be referred to later as needed to process the data. The participant agreed to the recording and the researcher reassured him that the recording and all other documents would be kept confidential, in a password protected file on a laptop. The researcher also let the participant know that she would be taking notes throughout the interview of key points and themes as they were noted. The interview began with general questions about family, career, and day to day life. At this point the researcher started the recording and began with asking about just after the participants were married. Soon the interview took on a life of its own as the participant began opening up about his experience as a stay-at-home dad. At times during the interview questions were asked to clarify the meaning of the parts of conversation which will aid the researcher when answering the research questions. While neither the researcher nor the participant knew the exact course the interview would take, it quickly became apparent that this man, this stay-at-home father was finally able to tell his story, to give meaning to that time in his life in a way that had never happened. There were only a few times when the researcher interjected into the conversation, not to steer the direction of the conversation, but to open dialogue on themes already mentioned allowing for the participant to expand on the details. The participant was encouraged to allow himself the space to speak openly

and candidly about his experiences as a stay-at-home father. In this study, the participant was not constrained by a set of questions, but instead he was given a platform where he controlled the narrative of his experiences as they had meaning for him. The participant found his own direction for his storytelling interview, the first few interjections of the researcher were only formality, and very few and far between. At the conclusion of the interview, there time was given for reflection and thought to ensure that the participant felt heard and that his story was complete. This time also allowed TM to go back to the discuss the themes that were most important to him and his experience. The interview concluded with an understanding that the researcher may contact the participant, if needed to clarify themes and perspectives as data was reviewed. As this study explored the socio-cultural aspects of fathering and fatherhood, and intimate perspectives, it was important to ensure that the participant understood that what was said is being kept confidential and that the interview location is discreet.

The researcher scheduled a two-hour interview session with the participant, and more time was scheduled for a follow up conversation. As mentioned above the interview was audiotaped, and field notes were attained by the researcher. The audio version of the interview was transcribed into a word document, word for word and editing took place shortly after the interview. As the participant shared the story of his journey and his intimate thoughts and feelings, the researcher took detailed notes in summary format which were collated after the interview was completed. Analyses focused on the key aspects of the participants' perspectives and the essence of meaning he ascribed to his experience. As the data was gathered, the researcher carefully examined the participants' phenomenological narration and determined that more detailed information was needed to get a deeper sense of the participant's experience. A careful examination of this process helped the researcher conclude that the research questions

were answerable and the data collection techniques that were used allowed the researcher to grasp the essence of the study's theme which was demonstrated in the participants story. As much as possible, the participant led the flow of the conversation and thus created an intimate portraiture while at the same time the research was gathered, and the data was driven by the participant's own unique experiences.

Instrumentation

The initial design of a semi-structured interview process, initiated by the researcher, provided an ice breaker to get the conversation flowing, to help the participant relax and gain trust. The questions used during the interview and contained in Appendix B were only there as a guide as they were needed to help the conversation flow. A few comments were interjected into the conversation where there was a pause and were used for clarification of themes and ideas as they related to the study's parameters. These questions were not used to guide the conversation in any direction, but rather the participant was offered the freedom to steer the discussion based on the intimacy of his experience, where he ascribed the most meaning. The interview continued in a semi-structured manner which created a narrative story telling style of conversation. The researcher closely observed but also allowed for freedom in the experience. The participant sat opposite me at a table, in a local coffee shop. We sat away from others allowing for the participant to let his thoughts and feelings flow freely as he told his story. The interview questions that were previously designed became unnecessary as the participant followed his own path in the conversation as he expressed the emotions, essence and thoughts he had along his journey as a stay-at-home father. The questions, instead of providing a prompt or navigating the flow of the conversation, now encouraged the open narrative of the participant as

he portrayed the meaning of his role as a stay-at-home dad. The interview unfolded, unscripted lead by the participant who spoke of his story, of the meaning that he found through his experience as a stay-at-home dad. The structure of the interview was not dictated by questions or a script, but instead offered a place to be heard, for a story to be told, for the expression of an experience to unfold organically, unabridged by a script. The study participant took the story narrative where it had greatest meaning for him.

Ethical Considerations

To the best of the ability of the researcher, the participants were informed of the study procedure and any risks that may occur during the study period. These risks may include sharing of information with local agencies in the event the participants' disclosure puts them or their minor children in imminent danger. Another important consideration is the potential for others to become aware of the stay-at-home fathers' career status outside the home which could potentially cause social stigma from family and friends if disclosed. The qualitative, intimate nature of this study and the information shared within the interviews makes establishing a high level of trust between the researcher and the participants imperative. As the researcher gets closer to the participants, some information shared may put the researcher or the participant in a situation where further disclosure is needed. Great care was taken to protect the identity of the participant using a pseudonym for personal information.

Role of the Researcher

As a quiet observer of the story that was unfolding before her, the researcher gathered, compared and discovered themes of the data through the participants' narrative storytelling,

observations, and field notes. Although present for the interview the researcher took an observational role, while the participant took an active role in the interview process in what Witz (2006) describes as the “co-explorer of their experience” (p.248). Instead of merely understanding and describing this father’s experience, the interviewer encouraged him to express himself freely and naturally. To effectively gain this trust Witz (2006) explains that the research must appreciate the greater significance of the larger societal and human concerns that have prompted this research study. In doing so, the participant recognized that the researcher is serving a greater cause which allowed them to be open and forthcoming with whatever feelings, values, or past events that they felt were important (Witz, 2006; Witz & Sung Ah, 2011). During this qualitative study, the researcher’s role was understanding the importance of gaining trust with the participant, this process began even before the interview process during the early conversations before the interview. A careful explanation of the study procedures was provided, and the assurance of safety and confidentiality were explained and reiterated throughout the research process. The researcher gained a sense of credibility by acknowledging her credentials as a master’s student with permission from the IRB to conduct research. With this knowledge the study participant was comfortable with telling his story and he established a strong rapport with the researcher. This type of cooperation is what Witz (2006) described as “The Participant as Ally” (p. 249) approach; a relationship that should be established even during recruitment. The importance of the relationship between the researcher and the participants is one of mutuality, showing an equality of voices which is critical to empowering these fathers to tell their story. Gay et al. (2012) explains the importance of the researcher establishing “a high degree of trust and respect” similar to that of a “close friendship” (p. 405). After interviews were conducted, the researcher spent time reflecting on the information presented in the interview and made an

ongoing analysis of the narrative. The researcher kept track of important themes during the interview process; by checking back with their notes to ensure nothing relevant was overlooked. The researcher gathered all the data from the interview, analyzed the narratives and presented themes that align with the research question and the essence of meaning for the participant as a stay-at-home dad. These accounts were then filtered by the researcher as she formed a comparison from the data. During the data collating process, member checks were performed with the participant related to the study to confirm that data was recorded and interpreted accurately. The participant was contacted and given this thesis to read, give feedback and approve for accuracy. He accepted the content of the thesis as it was written and stated that it accurately portrayed the meaning and facts that he intended. Confidentiality was established and maintained and there were no ethical concerns that surfaced during the interview process. Before, during and after the interview process the researcher continually collaborated with the participant, which established a strong bond of trust from the beginning to the end of the research process. Working in partnership, they constructed the final narrative which described the participants' experiences and meanings connected with them. As a final safeguard, the researcher conducted a peer review where the researcher evaluated the data with colleagues to ensure accuracy in interpretation.

Additionally, the researcher reflected on their unique positionality and the potential biases while engaging in this work. The researcher was 55 years old at the time of the interview, she grew up in a Seattle, Washington suburb, in a white middle class family, she identifies as a white female and is a stay-at-home mom. Her Socioeconomic status (SES) is currently low income and has been most of her adult life. She believes in equity for all genders, ethnicities and abilities. The researcher believes that one parent should stay home with the children, and this fact

could have influenced her interactions with TM as he and GM were both career oriented before having children. TM may have spoken with more ease during the interview as he may have identified with the researcher also being a stay-at-home parent. TM may have perceived the interviewer as an accomplished parent which he could have influenced him talking about negative parts of his parenting experiences. Before the interview the researcher perceived TM as a successful white man, who could relate to her based on the era and location they grew up in. The fact that we share commonality in being stay-at-home parents, may have influenced the researcher's reactions to the father's narrative. The difference in SES had the potential to cause bias due to the fact that the researcher and the participant's experiences were so different. There was the potential for the participant to interpret the researcher's reactions to his story and possibly hold back information. The researcher's beliefs about parents staying home could have affected the validity of the participants narrative. If TM had felt any scrutiny from the researcher and her strong beliefs, he may have held back from being authentic with his experiences and story. The researcher being female had the potential to make the participant feel gender bias or give him the feeling that he was being judged on his gender and choice to stay-at-home; this could affect the validity of the data due to the possibility that the participant could say what they think the researcher wanted them to say.

Data Analysis

After interviewing the participant, the researcher worked from the premise that "Understanding Something as a Whole," and "Seeing Something as Part of a Larger Whole" (Witz, 2006; p.433) is the essence of appreciating and gaining awareness into the intimate struggles, joys, and emotional experience of stay-at-home fathers. An audio recording was used

during the interview process utilizing The Voice Recorder Application. The conversation was then transcribed by the researcher into a typed format using Microsoft Word. The researcher conducted an ongoing analysis of the data and ensured that the essence of data gathered early in the study was remembered as it happened. The interview content was transcribed with only the researchers gathering of themes, with caution taken as an outside observer to a narrative story to not interpret the story but to bring it together by connection common themes. Second, the researcher condensed and annotated the transcripts based on the key elements and common themes found in them. The researcher provided rich descriptions of the narratives as they were given and to identify recurring themes, while at the same time the researcher maintained the original spontaneity of the interview.

RESULTS

Meaning is found through one's experiences, in turn these experiences create our identity. Sometimes what we thought had meaning for us changes and this also changes our path, our journey our direction in life. For some men this path seems grounded in what society dictates as masculine of the gender specific roles that defined the typical male or female. In this study, the research looked into the essence of this meaning for one man, who in the beginning found his connection to the world through his work in the corporate world as the breadwinner of the family. Later his role changed, and he desired to be a stay-at-home dad where he also found his greatest joy. He realized the unique experience of being a primary giver not only offered him time with his children, but also a glimpse into his life, giving it a richer and fuller meaning. He spent a lot of his time reflecting on the fact that he wished he had approached the role of stay-at-home dad earlier, as he felt this was what he was meant to do.

During the interviews with the participant, some of the patterns the researcher witnessed included the present feelings of the participant as a stay-at-home father, and how he saw his role as compared to other men in corporate America and as compared to his own experience as a high level executive. This father described in detail his intimate relationship with his daughters and the impact that he had on their lives. He spoke of his involvement in their sports and activities and the sense of pride he got being able to be there for his girls. The researcher found out beyond just the basic information, that what the father in this study valued the most was time with his girls. He enjoyed being involved their activities, getting to know their personalities and discovering just how much fatherhood meant to him. What was important to this father was that he did not miss out on the best years of his children's lives. As he reflected upon what his

relationship would have been like with his girls had he remained in the corporate world, he concluded that he never would have gotten as close to them as he did being a stay-at-home dad. TM spoke of the struggles he had adjusting to being at home all the time, compared to the intensity and nonstop working hours of the corporate world. He also felt a disconnection from many of their friends as he embarked on the non-traditional role of primary caregiving and his male friends continued up the ladder of the corporate world. He also spoke of the struggle to fit in as with the other moms of his girls' friends, of being man and not being trusted with their daughters alone. The researcher also discovered that even though this father encountered some struggles and obstacles at first, the overall experience of raising and nurturing his children was very gratifying and one he wouldn't replace. TM offered his perspective as a groundbreaking stay-at-home father, but humbly spoke of himself as "just doing the right thing for his daughters" and that "they were the ones who taught him a lot about life and living." But overall, he realized just what an impression he made on his friends and family, at a time when men just didn't stay at home. He even concluded that his family who was reluctant at first saw what a difference it made in his children's lives and what a difference it made in him as a man.

The researcher discovered themes that portrayed the life of a stay-at-home father which answered the study research questions. These themes included ideas about the father's perception of his role as compared to his former colleagues or his neighbors and friends, he thoughtfully considered his role as a caregiver as it compared to his time as the breadwinner of the family, he found importance in the connection with his daughters as his role evolved, and this made the role of primary caregiver even more precious to him. Some moments that came to light during the interview included: TM (the participant) spoke of the conversation with his wife when they were first married, where they agreed she would be the primary caregiver while the children were

young, and he would take on that role as his daughters became teenagers. TM left a high paying job in the corporate world to have the experience of raising his daughters.

So, I had to learn a whole new way of communicating I had that I hadn't had to use it to get up to the corporate ladder. And also, you're not so concerned about people's feelings. I hate to put it that way. But once you're home it's all about the feelings, and the emotions, and I became, and GM (his wife) and I became a better person, once I made that transition. I was much more relaxed, I was much more in the moment, instead of planning, the next six months out.

He mentioned how much he valued his role of caregiving, and the meaning and connection to family it brought to his life. The researcher noted a sense of sadness in his voice as he lamented that he wished he had had more time with his daughters when they were younger; but he quickly circled back to how blessed he felt to have the time he did. TM valued his connection with his daughters, time that he could never get back when he was working sixty or eighty hours a week at his corporate job. TM spoke of the stigma he encountered from friends and family as they asked how he could give up a high paying job to being the primary caregiver for his children. Women, other mothers, were reluctant to send their daughters over to his house to play, because he was male; he felt a sense of discrimination. The researcher witnessed that this intimate portraiture went in a direction that she was not expecting, but she followed the lead of the participant during the interview and gained most authentic view into the essence of meaning they place on their role as primary caregiver. This type of narrative captured the true essence of fatherhood for this man, not as it compared to his wife's experience, but as he created his own meaning for his role as dad. This offered a more intimate experience for him as he led the conversation and now understood the importance of his voice being heard.

A Father's Perception of his Role Compared to Other Men

In our society we are constantly comparing ourselves to others. We look at our lives, and we look at someone else's life, a coworker, neighbor, family member, and we compare our experience with those around us. As TM began to navigate his new role as primary caregiver for his daughters, he realized that not only had his role changed but how others perceived him was different as well. "There was almost a little bit of jealousy that I didn't have to put on a suit and have to put on a tie you know, have more of a relaxed life. In some ways and others were talking like, how could you have your wife support you?" TM had very strong reactions to the concept of gender stereotyping and went on to state "I'm like to each their own you know; you can look down on me or think less of me for doing this. But for me, I did the 100 hours a week for 15 years. This is my time to say I'm gonna spend it with my family, I'm not gonna go to my deathbed wishing I worked more." According to TM, there was the concept of allowing his wife to support him, more than the jealousy factor from other men. He observed "but there was more of that how can you let your wife support than the jealousy and I agree our friends are people from West Linn and they're very wealthy and you know, they got a big job. They get their whole self being from their jobs. I figured there was more to life than that." In this statement there was also mention of socioeconomic status which TM ascribed as a reason for why these feelings would be even stronger among those in his social circle. While this was not something the researcher expected, it is perhaps a stepping off point for future studies.

The Role of Caregiver Versus Breadwinner

One theme that resonated throughout the interview, was the intimate feelings TM had over his role of caregiver, and how profoundly it had affected his life. This was true both at the time he was the primary caregiver and after his children grew older and moved out, he realized

the incredible impact the role of being a stay-at-home dad had on him. GM and TM discussed how they would raise their children; the first 14 years GM would stay home with the girls, and from then on TM would be a stay-at-home dad. The reason for this choice was TM acknowledged that he was better at raising teenagers and GM was better with them when they were babies. For TM, the corporate breadwinning world meant up to a hundred hours a week at work, many out of town business trips and being on call at all hours, day and night. He was a federal employee who was high up in the ranks and was well respected at his place of employment. In contrast, as a stay-at-home dad things were much different. TM mentioned “Once I got home, it was like, that structure of a corporate environment was gone. I didn't have meetings starting five in the morning till eight o'clock at night, every day, I had a hard time adjusting.”

No longer was TM responsible for deadlines and every hour of the day planned out; now he was concerned with the well being of his daughters and being present at their activities. As the breadwinner, TM was the one in charge who managed other adults and they followed his instructions. As a stay-at-home dad, he soon discovered that that didn't work very well. “I had project plans, okay here's the week you know, and the girls are like, I am not reading that, you know? Dad that's not the way we roll you know?”

Conflict Between Parents when Roles are Reversed

TM mentioned that there were a few times he and GM disagreed about how to parent their girls, but that his girls being exposed to different parenting styles benefitted them in the long run. They agreed that TM would do the first 15 years of work, and GM would stay home with the girls while the girls were young. TM said “we said we'd kind of split the duties based on

you know, I love babies. I love infants but I can relate better with teenagers.” TM and GM had a mutual agreement on who would stay home with the children and when, but it wasn’t without some sacrifice. TM noted that they would have swapped roles sooner because he felt GM lost some of her independence being out of the workforce for so long.

The decision itself was agreed upon, but the methods used to parent the girls was vastly different. TM mentioned “Also in that switch, and we had different mindsets on even down to allowances, you know, that kind of stuff, and some parenting type stuff.” TM spoke about the differences in families and how they do things, that GM’s family was “tight knit and her mom was a helicopter mom” and my family was “just figure it out on your own.” After many long discussions they concluded that even though they parented differently it was important to do the parenting thing together. As this researcher observed the interview, there was a sense that the issue of parenting styles was often a source of conflict for GM and TM. But after stating the difficulties they had, TM also discovered that their difference in handling situations actually was beneficial to the girls. He noted that “you know it wasn't always good, but then again, the girls got to see two different ways of handling the same situation, that they'd run into and come back and say that helped us when we got older, that we were able to look at a problem from different angles, different social situations and work situations.” Just as Snitker (2018) discovered in her study, that “stay-at-home fathers create a distinct identity associated with fatherhood and masculinities that is different from the stay-at-home mother role” (p. 204). TM mentioned the differences in his role at work and with child rearing, and GM’s role at work and with the children. He spoke of how GM was more fly by the seat of your pants type of parent, and he found that difficult because he was more of a planner. TM said the differences made their overall parenting plan “well rounded.”

The Sacrifices Experienced by a Stay-at-Home Father

The decision to leave the corporate world and stay at home with his daughters was a huge sacrifice for TM's entire family. While the impact financially and initially on TM's change in roles hit him the hardest, the entire family had to make adjustments to make it work. "It was a bigger change for me that I thought it would be because I've been so driven career wise, like to support a family of 3 and so it was work, work, work, work and then switching. I got a lot of my self esteem from the job that I was doing." In fact, TM mentioned more than once that if they had to do it again, he probably would have stayed some earlier in the girl's lives "GM (TM's wife) would have started working when they were 10 or 12 because I think GM kind of lost her independence a little bit." The letdown for TM leaving the corporate world was more intense in the first few months after, but soon this sacrifice turned into a reward, "it was a break for me you know, a different kind of stress, but a happy stress." TM often mentioned in small tidbits, the cost to family financially, as he spoke of the girls lamenting that they wouldn't be able to have all the things their friends had: fancy clothing, big vacations, and other fancy and flashy things.

Stigmas Encountered as a Stay-at-Home Father

TM described much of his experience as a stay-at-home dad as "next to marrying my wife and having two daughters it was the best decision I've ever made," and that he "would hands down recommend it." He began to discuss some areas where he felt he was stigmatized as a man in the role of primary caregiver. Doucet (2006) spoke of this stigma in her study where she found that "many fathers speak about how they must tread carefully because of the moral judgments, or suspicious about the fit between male bodies and other embodied subjects" (p.706). Doucet (2006) explained that "this is the window through which many men see the need

to be careful around their daughters and more specifically, the female friends of teen daughters” (p.706) referring to sleepovers. TM spoke of the difficulties he experienced when his daughters wanted to have a sleepover and many of their friend’s moms stated, “I’m a little uncomfortable sending my daughter over to the house.” He told me of times when the parents of his daughter’s friends would “call concerned that I was a stay-at-home dad and their girls would be in the house.” TM mentioned that even though he was a federal agent and was well educated he still that he thought that it was a “society thing.” TM spoke of frustration he felt for his daughters having to miss out on having two of their best friends over because the moms were leery of him. TM said hypothetically “how do you combat that kind of statement?” The moms would only allow their daughters to come over 2 hours later when TM’s wife got home. TM relented and told me that he thought that “in the end it was decided long before I even did it, their minds were made up before they even heard I was going to be a stay-at-home dad.” It was here that TM looked back on his time in the corporate world and had a correlation between the women he worked with their “making a third of what I was making, and they were criticized constantly.” He ended by saying “it’s not that they didn’t want to be home with their kids, it’s that they were following their happiness at the same time.” He really connected his experience and the stigma he encountered as a man in a role typically fashioned for women, the same as women felt in the male dominated corporate world. TM concluded with his thoughts about the stigma experienced by society as a stay-at-home parent: “whether society will ever get over this stigma, or this labeling of lazy dad, who just wants to sit at home and watch soap operas, which as a stay-at-home parent, there's no time to just sit around and watch soaps. Society's view on it is a little outdated I think, unfortunately.”

A Groundbreaking Experience

More than any other overarching sense of meaning that came from TM's experience as a stay-at-home dad, was the constant undertones of what a remarkable experience it was for him to be a stay-at-home dad. "My identity, as I tell, my legacy is my children. And if I don't ever want, I never looked at GM, I never wanted to get older, and our kids say we wished you were around more. Because that would be more of a heartbreak than anything else." (TM) Even when his decision was met with questioning and ridicule, TM still felt his choice was breaking ground for other men. TM spoke of how he "switched from work to being a home dad who was, I found joy I never thought I'd find." TM was adamant that he "wasn't gonna go to my deathbed wishing I worked more." TM also was surprised at the support he felt when he went to coffee hour with all the other moms that solidified his groundbreaking decision to become a stay-at-home dad. TM spoke of the acceptance he experienced with the mom coffee group, "it was nothing but praise from these women; they said, 'my husband would never stay home with the kids, 'You know why, why would you do that? you know, when you can have this career, notoriety and all the other stuff that their husbands have at work.'" TM paused and said, "because that's not what life's about!"

DISCUSSION

This study began with the intention of finding a deeper understanding into what fatherhood was like for men who choose to stay at home with their children. The review of the literature searched for an evolving definition of masculinity, one which included the softer side. The stoic, breadwinning male was the primary way that men were described with little attention given to the notion of men as nurturers. This research study begins where current literature leaves off and has provided a further look into the man as a father, a nurturer, and a caregiver.

The study documented evidence that caregiving for children is as important as breadwinning for the participant as he discovered the essence of meaning in his life. This research project began by exploring the image of the stay-at-home father, and how past studies on the topic only touched the surface of these men's lives. Doucet (2006) looked at a man's caregiving role in an "estrogen filled world" where he was only looked at as man doing women's work in a mothering role. Much of the literature covered the work family balance and how differently that balance was defined for men versus women once they were both home from work (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Lamb, 1986; Latshaw & Hale, 2016; Rochlen et al., 2008; Tichenor et al., 2011; Way, 2010; West et al., 2009). What was spectacular about this current study was the fact that the participant was able to give insight into a primary caregiving role from the perspective of someone who had also spent many years in corporate America. It is this combination that gave the participant an in depth comparison of life as the bread winner, versus life as a stay-at-home father. This study and the portrait provided by the participant confirmed the hypothesis that in the case of this man, staying at home and nurturing his children during their teen years was more rewarding for him than making large sums of money in the corporate world. One aspect of the interview that was unexpected was TM's observation of the women at

his work. He recalls that these women were given a hard time for their choice to work in the corporate world instead of being home with their children. TM concluded that it was similar to what he experienced as a stay-at-home dad; that it went against society's expectations for gender specific roles, and it made people around them uncomfortable. During the interview he stated he did give up a large portion of his income and gave up many strong relationships and ties to the community that he had had for years but he would not have traded the experience for anything. In fact, he mentioned on many occasions during the interview that he wished he would have begun his stay-at-home dad journey earlier in his children's lives.

The interview with TM found him to be grounded in his role as parent. He described some difficulties at first because he parented his daughters as if he was still the CEO, as he experienced conflict in masculinity from traditional to a more nurturing role. As TM became more comfortable in a caregiving role, he noted stark differences in the way he parented compared to the way his wife parented. Dolan (2014) also described similar conflict in men who were enrolled in a fathering program that the men "appeared to embrace parenting styles more commonly associated with women, but they did not completely distance themselves from the traditional fathering templates" (p. 812). TM quickly discovered that his corporate structured parenting style was not going to go over well with his teenagers who had been used to their mom's style of parenting which was more relaxed in its scheduling and structure. TM mentioned that he had to find his own parenting style, and also have discussions with GM to find compromise between their different ideas of how to raise the girls. The overall takeaway was that his girls were better off having two unique styles of coping with the same situation and it offered them more choices when dealing with their own adult lives.

Adamski (2011) discussed Jungian theory and the archetypes which drive our behavior, the persona in this study would be the way in which others perceived TM as a stay-at-home father. Although the typical persona would find a person willing to adapt to the expectations of society, in our study we found that while TM began his career as a typical masculine presence in the workplace, he discovered a broader meaning of masculinity that for him also included the role of nurturing. He was no longer defined just as the hard working CEO who worked long hours and often traveled away from family, but he discovered a deeper essence of his identity in his role as a stay-at-home dad. The results of this study illustrated how one man who had a successful career and was able to provide for his family, chose to become the primary caregiver for his children and he found a deeper, unique meaning for what it meant to be a man. As TM went against the societal pressures of being the typical strong, stoic, provider, he discovered a greater fulfillment in his role as father to his children. Bach (2019) “emphasized how the nurturing practices of involved fatherhood change and challenge conventional ideas about what it means to be a man” (p. 339). In fact, TM found that caregiving and nurturing was just as much a part of his identity as his position in the corporate world. As Jung hypothesized, and as the results of this study suggest, within the anima archetype there is a woman within a man; this sense of nurturing that is present along with the innate desire to provide (Adamski, 2011). The research documented that it was possible for men to find their identity as a nurturing father as much as men in the corporate world find satisfaction in their role as provider. This unique perspective not only showed us what life was like for him as the primary caregiver, but it also showed how much his life had changed after he left the corporate world. TM was able to discuss the changes for his life, financially, socially, and emotionally as he switched roles from provider/breadwinner to stay-at-home father.

Another finding from this current study was the perceptions of others as they observed the participant in a caregiving role. As Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda (2000) found that gender roles were so specific, that anything outside the societal expectation was seen as unacceptable. TM's experience with the mothers of his children's friends, was indicative of this type of gender bias, where their children wouldn't be safe with a man at a sleepover. The mothers found it odd and uncomfortable for them, and they were suspicious of TM, even though in the corporate world he was trusted implicitly. The parents of the girls asked TM when their mother would be home, and if he would be home alone with them. The frustration that TM felt was apparent as he stated "Oh, um I understand there are bad people out there, but I was a federal agent" (line, 218). Even though we had come so far as a society, there were gender biases still so engrained that something as simple as a sleepover was met with suspicion because he was a man. The friends were allowed to come over after GM arrived home, but not before. Although TM shrugged off their suspicion of him, he was obviously impacted by their questioning, and it changed the way he interacted with his daughter's friends. He was much more cautious and considered the ramifications of a false accusation by never putting himself in that position. This type of stereotyping is precisely why more studies such as these are needed. As more research into the biases men face as caregivers are discovered, we can help improve our view of men as nurturers and expand on the importance of accepting men and the nurturing part of them, not just as the breadwinner.

Implications

This study and the results therein showed the profound impact that being a stay home father had on TM as he discovered the nurturing part of his masculinity and how much it was a

hidden part of his identity as a man. We discovered that this man found his job as primary caregiver to be equally as important if not more important than his role as CEO. We witnessed the participant's struggle to fit in to a society that primarily sees men as the strong provider and is often suspicious when men tread in new territory like primary caregiving. We came to an understanding that the role of primary caregiving, while important to the participant came with costs, both financially and socially. Finally, this researcher witnessed similar findings as were expected from her research, that this man did indeed possess nurturing skills, that he was so moved by his time as dad to his children that he only wished he had stayed at home earlier in their lives. This study also found that TM experienced the expected resistance from those around him in the form of suspicion and questioning as to why he would want to stay at home. In conclusion, we can surmise from this intimate portrayal, that the role of primary caregiver is an important part of masculinity and how men see themselves in relation to their children, just as much as their perceived success and power as the CEO of a big company. These findings could be useful in areas of work family balance, in programs where couples are struggling with their roles inside the household. As evidenced in much of the literature, often when women get home, even if they work full time, it's expected that they also take care of much of the domestic duties as well. If parenting programs and counseling included the data from studies like these and were able to show fathers that nurturing is also an important part of being a man, perhaps the conflicts within a household would be lessened as expectations become more equitable in regard to caregiving. This study uncovered the profound idea that children benefit from not only the playful interactions of their father, but also from nurturing aspects as well.

The implications for these findings could have practical use supporting a further understanding and inclusion into society's incomplete definition of masculinity. There is a great

need to change current perspectives of men and masculinity from one where men see their role as provider is just as important as the role of caregiver. This study was designed to give the stay-at-home father a voice to tell his story. Through this portrayal there are implications to use the results for other areas in society. The findings speak to the beginning of a sense of empowerment for men in their role not only as provider, but also as primary nurturer for their children. This empowerment could prove useful in classes where fathers were once compelled to attend and now may choose to attend out of a sense of importance in their fathering role. Dolan (2014) noted that much of the research looked at the difficulties faced by family welfare organizations when attempting to get fathers to participate in support programs. The findings from this study could be used as a tool in parenting classes, offering encouragement to new fathers embarking on their new identity as dad. This research provided one father's perspective that would offer encouragement to other fathers who may feel their masculinity being threatened if they chose to embrace a more nurturing role with their children as they witness the experience of TM who was both a CEO and a nurturing dad.

Another important implication is the idea that this research may help society come to a better understanding that men are not only the strong, stoic provider but that the definition of masculinity and what it means to be a man, or a father, holds with it a softer nurturing side that is just as profound. As more men stay at home with their children, the implications for changes in policy, family leave and the importance of including fathers in the legislation can only be furthered by studies such as these. We recently saw as one man high up in politics chose to take family leave with his newborn and how this was met with much discontent from those in power. One day as we further research into men as primary caregivers, as nurturers as well as strong providers, society may find acceptance and see these acts as part of what it means to be a father

to a new baby. Not only will a woman be given maternity leave to nurture her newborn, but a man's role in nurturing his newborn will be seen as just as important giving way to paternal leave as well. As more men are given this platform to tell their story, such as TM has, society and lawmakers may recognize the importance not only of mothering for a woman but fathering for a man.

Limitations

This study was limited in the sense that there was only one participant. Although this only allowed for one man's perspective, it also was possible to gain much insight into the everyday life of this stay-at-home father. The study would have been enriched by hearing the stories of other fathers who stay at home. Perhaps we would have heard the other side of the situation where a father may not have chosen to stay at home by choice, and thus may have experienced much more difficulty. The methods were used as described, although when collating the data from the interviews there were no comparison interviews from other participants to further support the conclusions of this study. Although a portraiture offered a glimpse into the one participant, which was the intended purpose of the study, having more stories to look at and compare to would have made for a richer overall presentation of life as a stay-at-home father.

This study examined the daily life of a stay-at-home dad, and what the intimate day in and day out experience was like for him. It was an unscripted portrayal of whatever one stay-at-home father chose to find importance in. We discovered the essence of meaning for TM, and how he saw himself as nurturer. We realized that much of what TM experienced as a stay-at-home father was expected based on past literature; the adjustment from being a CEO to being a stay-at-home father, the resistance he felt from others as he chartered new territory, and the

perceptions of others of him as man. What was unexpected was that TM offered a view into one man's experience not only as a stay at father, but one who had held a position of power in the corporate world.

Some of the difficulties experienced while carrying out the parameters of this study were finding eligible participants that were willing to be part of the study. Even though the study was advertised in numerous locations, interest was low and the few who met the criteria for the study were unable to participate either due to personal reasons or time constraints. Although it would have been ideal to have more participants, the study discovered a rich story from the one participant who was willing to be involved. The pandemic and people's hesitancy towards being part of a study may have played a role in gaining willing participants towards the end, but at first it was more just logistics. It is apparent in talking to stay-at-home dad networks that there were barriers to participation in studies. As I spoke to the board for one website, it was obvious that they were used to researchers coming to them asking for participants. This may have lessened the motivation for these fathers to participate in this study. If this researcher was able to broaden the places where the study was advertised, there is a higher likelihood that the study would have had more visibility and thus more willing participants. Another limitation of this study is there would be no control over the validity of the father's statements. Although this researcher attempted to cultivate a sense of trusting relationship within this interview it is difficult to measure the authenticity in the stay-at-home father's stories. The data from this study comes in the form of the participant's lived experience. As more studies of this type are performed, it may be possible to gather conclusions based on a larger pool of participants and more studies to compare to.

Future Directions for Research and Conclusions

Further research needs to be conducted in the form of more phenomenological studies that include a larger pool of participants. With more data and more participants, we gain a more detailed sense of the lives of stay-at-home fathers from different perspectives. This research may give further insight into the trials and struggles that these men face as they enter the primary caregiving world. It would be helpful if further research included several participants from different backgrounds to discover the stories from other men who stay at home with their children. Future research would open the door to the stories of men whose experience was different from TM, and thus the data gathered would be a truer sense of what these father's lives are really like. Regarding further research, a portrayal of a contrasting perspective would help to give a more in depth representation of the stay-at-home fathers life, not just the positive experience of the participant from this study, but also from other men who may have struggled with the transition from provider to nurturer. Further research would help to gather a more realistic narrative about the lives of stay-at-home fathers if the data was gathered from a larger group of participants with varying levels of struggles, from financial, to social to emotional, and from society. Further study on stay-at-home fathers may branch off into the statistical sense as well, looking at trends and data from the perspective of others in society. Research may look at how present day society defines masculinity, and how has this definition changed. It would be beneficial to look at how the different generations perceive men in a caregiving role, and what are differences noted with each generation. As more men enter the world of stay-at-home fathers, a longitudinal study that looks at how societal expectations for men and the definition of masculinity changes over time. More research that explores the intimate lives of these men may help to steer this changing perspective and help to lessen the frustrations and struggles these men face as they become stay-at-home fathers.

Stay-at-home fathers will benefit from having their story told. Just as TM from this study experienced hesitations and suspicions from his friends and the parents of his children's friends, so does society hold some hesitancy as men depart from traditional masculine roles and engage in a softer, nurturing role of primary caregiving. This study found that the experience of primary caregiving for one father offered a sense of strong meaning for him as a man, and as a human being. He was able to tell his story and conclude that his life was enriched from the experience of raising his daughters, and it didn't make him any less of a man because he was the primary caregiver. This study concluded that for this one father, his life was much more fulfilling and had greater meaning when he stayed at home as compared to when he worked in the corporate world. Although TM's decision and subsequent time as a stay-at-home father was occasionally met with resistance from other parents, friends, and neighbors, he described the overall experience of raising his girls as positive. The research discovered that there was hesitancy on the part of those around TM to adjust to the idea of a man being in the primary caregiver role. Some of those around TM viewed him with suspicion because he was male, others looked upon him as an amazing guy that they looked up to. In a sense TM's story sets the foundation for society to reconsider their hard and fast definition of masculinity that portrays men as the stoic strong provider, and which shies away from the nurturing side which in the past would be considered weak or less than masculine. As Doucet (2013) noted in her most recent study, it's important for men to not only be seen as caregiver, but to also be acknowledged as fathers, who father, a separate entity from mothering. This study and others that may transpire in the future are important for a society, for policymakers who are making decisions regarding family policy, demonstrate the importance of recognizing a man's role as the nurturer of his children and the redefining of masculinity to a broader sense to include nurturing within that definition. The

importance of this study cannot be underestimated; from a policy standpoint and societal point of view as we move away from gender stereotypes and bias towards men and women both in the workplace and in the home and move into a place where there is equity and fairness for both.

After completing this study and analyzing the data, one of the most compelling things to come out of this research was that the opinions, feelings, and experiences of this stay-at-home dad were so spot on with the trickles of literature on the subject. It was as if the interview with TM was a window into how the researcher envisioned the outcome of this study while it was still under consideration. TM's experience as a stay-at-home dad, and this study which allowed him to awaken all the memories from that wonderful time in his life, were remarkable.

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<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007816725358>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Forms



irb@missouristate.edu

To: Goodwin, David R; King, Elizabeth K; Hosking, Christi; Test, Joan E
Mon 3/25/2019 12:32 PM

...



Missouri State.
UNIVERSITY

To:

Joan Test
Childhood Ed & Fam Studies, Reading Foundations & Tech
David Goodwin, Elizabeth King

RE: Notice of IRB Approval

Submission Type: Initial

Study #: IRB-FY2019-160

Study Title: Father's as Primary Caregivers: A portraiture

Decision: Approved

Approval Date: March 24, 2019

Expiration Date: March 23, 2020

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the period indicated.

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:

PI: Joan Test

Co-PI: David Goodwin, Elizabeth King

Primary Contact: Christi Hosking

Other Investigators: Christi Hosking

Re: IRB-FY2019-160 - Renewal: Renewal Approval

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com

To: King, Elizabeth K EKing@MissouriState.edu, Hosking, Christi Hosking123@live.missouristate.edu

Date: Wed, Feb 9, 2022, 8:34 AM



To:

Elizabeth King

Childhood Ed & Fam Studies

RE: Notice of IRB Approval

Submission Type: Renewal

Study #: IRB-FY2019-160

Study Title: Father's as Primary Caregivers: A portraiture

Decision: Approved

Approval Date: February 9, 2022

Expiration Date: February 9, 2023

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:

PI: Elizabeth King

Co-PI:

Primary Contact: Christi Hosking

Other Investigators: Joan Test, David Goodwin, Christi Hosking, Muhammad Raza

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Clarifying Questions

1. How did it feel for you like the difference between working outside the home and being home?
2. Was staying at home more of a break for you and more of a letdown for GM?
3. How do you think being the primary caregiver benefitted your children? How was it harder for them?

Probing Questions:

4. So, you said that you went to coffee meetings with other moms? And how did they take having a guy energy and their female, little circle?
5. Are you still off [work] besides the Board thing?
6. Did you consider the societal view of men, and about what your impact would be as far staying home compared to being the breadwinner?
7. Could you discuss more about your transition from the corporate world and being a stay-at-home father?

Questions Answered Through Conversation:

1. How do you see yourself in relation to other men, whether other friends, family members, those who work outside the home?
2. What are your perceptions and feelings about being a stay-at-home father?
3. If you had the choice again would you choose to stay-at-home? Why or why not?
4. What stigma or criticism have you encountered as you decided to become the primary caregiver for your children? How did you handle it? How has it changed over time?
5. What has been the reaction of friends and family on your decision to stay-at-home?