The Mother’s Perspective: Factors Considered When Choosing to Enter a Stay-at-Home Father and Working Mother Relationship

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Abstract
A qualitative study was conducted to examine the decision-making factors of entering a stay-at-home father and working mother relationship based on the mother’s perspective. A total of 20 married, heterosexual, working mothers with biological children aged 1 to 4 years were asked questions regarding how they decided to enter a stay-at-home father and working mother relationship as well as contributing factors to this decision. The findings presented in this article were part of a larger study that examined mothers’ overall perspectives of the working mother stay-at-home father dynamics. The themes that emerged regarding how the decision was made to enter this kind of relationship were creating a work–family life balance, utilizing the cost-benefit ratio, and applying personality/traits strengths.

Keywords
gender role, male role, role reversal, fathering, parenting

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In the United States and other economically developed nations, there has been a rise in the female breadwinner role and thus a shifting away from the sole male breadwinner model (Meisenbach, 2010). As families shift into this nontraditional provider role, there are significant changes in the families’ home role, where there is an increased presence of men in fathering roles that challenge traditional expectations (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008). The increasing number of female breadwinners has allowed more opportunity for fathers to stay home as primary caregivers.

According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau, 211,000 families identified their family arrangements as a working mother and stay-at-home father dynamic, which increased from 154,000 reported in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This is a 37% increase in self-reported stay-at-home father and working mother arrangements over a 4-year span. It is interesting to note that in 2014, 5.203 million mothers identified their family arrangements as a stay-at-home mother and working father arrangement, which significantly increased from 5.020 million mothers in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Overall, the total number of married couples with children younger than the age of 15 years actually decreased over the 4-year span. In 2010, it was reported that 22.138 million families were married couples and decreased to 21.549 million in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). As society experiences families changing to non-traditional roles, developing a better understanding of these families will help optimize family functioning and quality of life.

What is known is that the past 30 years have brought significant changes in parenting roles, work roles, and responsibilities (Rochlen, Suizzo, et al., 2008). Although the number of the stay-at-home father and working mother dynamic is increasing, there is limited research in this area. Within the past 15 years, research has begun looking at marital satisfaction, gender role conflict and strain, and how society perceives role reversal. Little

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research has been done on the lived experiences and perceptions of these families.

As the working mother, stay-at-home father arrangement increases (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), it is imperative to have a clear understanding of this dynamic in order to support these families. This research can also be utilized to better inform others contemplating making this change in their own family. A phenomenological perspective also promotes sensitivity to the found perspectives and enhances the understanding of how parenting roles are changing. Overall, exploring the perspectives of the mother specifically, provides important detail and insight into their lived experiences. This research used a qualitative phenomenological study to allow the researcher to further the knowledge regarding the role of stay-at-home fathers and what this means to the mothers by exploring the mothers’ perspectives.

The literature review provided a background of previous research conducted on information relative to the shift of nontraditional family roles. Specifically, this research explored societal views on parenting roles, as well as a look into gender theory as a way to better comprehend how roles are shaped and understood.

**Impact of Societal Views**

Societal views have strong impacts on choices and decision making. How a person perceives they are viewed is often taken into consideration when making life choices. Societal views of parenting roles was explored to gain insight into how this could affect parenting decisions. When exploring societal views of parenting roles, some of the findings noted by previous researchers were negative perspectives regarding the working mother role and more conflicting feelings about the stay-at-home father role.

One reason that working mothers were viewed more negatively was that they were seen as more concerned with their personal successes than the successes of their children (Paré & Dillaway, 2005). The negative view was stronger when the choice to enter a nontraditional role was seen as a personal gain rather than a decision out of necessity. Thus, employed mothers were less disliked when described as working out of financial necessity rather than for personal fulfillment (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). In the cases where the decision to work out of the home was made from preference, the moms were viewed as selfish. It was speculated that this may be because the prescribed role for a mother is to care for children and abandoning this role may be perceived as an especially selfish act (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005).

Another negative perspective on working mothers identified by previous researchers was that society still viewed “traditional” mothering as ideal since the mother’s focus is solely on the children. A stay-at-home mother was seen as a duty, not a job. Societal norms suggest that a stay-at-home mother prioritizes her family and children above financial contribution and a career (Paré & Dillaway, 2005). Commonly held beliefs continue to uphold the idea that a woman’s place is in the home, giving physical and psychological quality time with their children each day to ensure proper development (Paré & Dillaway, 2005).

Working mothers also discussed their personal experiences of negative social stigmas (Dunn, Rochlen, & O’Brien, 2011). In the study by Dunn et al. (2011), these working mothers shared an experience of receiving negative attention by other mothers, specifically from stay-at-home mothers in their neighborhoods or child’s school. The working mothers reported feeling judged that they were less involved in home care responsibilities, and neglectful of motherly and domestic duties (Dunn et al., 2011). The feelings of being judged or falling short of their role as a mom could affect their parenting decisions.

Working mothers also shared how they felt pressure to work and that they lacked the emotional, social, and political support in their decision to stay home (Paré & Dillaway, 2005). These moms highlighted the societal pressures of being a “good” mom and the challenges of child rearing (Paré & Dillaway, 2005). This type of pressure makes it difficult to feel confident in their parenting decisions.

On the other hand, a more conflicting position with regard to the stay-at-home father role has been explored. Although there were some feelings of acceptance, researchers have also indicated that many in society still had reservations about this nontraditional role. It seemed that majority of the negative perceptions came from the traditional stay-at-home mother, who showed feelings of awkwardness and confusion (Rochlen, Mckelley, et al., 2008). Stay-at-home fathers were not regarded as highly as stay-at-home mothers and it was suggested that this negativity swayed fathers from being willing to assume this role (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005).

Similarly, it was noted that the conflicting feelings were felt directly by the working mothers whose husbands chose to be a stay-at-home dad. The mothers reflected on both positive and negative social stigmas they received regarding their husband’s role of stay-at-home father. Many working mothers reported experiencing negative reactions, such as accusing the stay-at-home father of being “lazy,” “having it easy,” or “not manly” (Dunn et al., 2011, p. 14).

As mentioned before, conflicting messages were received more for the stay-at-home father role than that of the working mother role. Some stay-at-home fathers experienced positive social feedback and support (Solomon,
These fathers felt “overwhelmingly positive responses from family, friends, and strangers” and indicated that this social support promoted a feeling of pride in their role (Solomon, 2014, p. 67). Some reported mixed support from those who were not socially close. The stay-at-home fathers reported that they were not bothered with reactions outside of their close family and friends (Rochlen, Suizzo, et al., 2008). The support that had the largest impact was the support from friends and family. These findings promote the idea that the norms for fathering have evolved and society is more accepting of stay-at-home father roles and fathers are leaning toward their inner circle for support versus being affected by societal views.

**Fathering**

To better understand the concept of nontraditional fathering, it is important to review the role of fathering, in general. The meaning of fathering has evolved over the years. Traditionally, fathers have been seen as having a secondary role in child rearing (Paré & Dillaway, 2005). According to Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987), there have been recent shifts in social expectations of fatherhood since the 1980s. Fathers are now seen as involved in the day-to-day care of their children, whereas involvement was described as engaged, accessible, and responsible (Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006).

Not only are fathers becoming more involved they are also viewed as more nurturing. The study by Wall and Arnold (2007) indicated that fathers are developing closer emotional relationships with their children, and sharing joys and work of caregiving with mothers. Through her international research with primary caregiving fathers, Doucet (2009) analyzed broad patterns in fathering that supported that fathers were more nurturing and involved. Because of the evolving fathering role, the research showed that fathers care for children indistinguishably from mothers (Doucet, 2009). Fathers were identified as being involved and nurturing, which supported the study by Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006).

With the shift in fathering and seeing them as more involved and hands on with their children, many studies began researching paternal leave and its importance. Rehel (2014) interviewed 85 fathers and mothers who had taken both maternal and paternal leave. This researcher was interested to see how paternal leave affected responsibility and partnership in parenting. Rehel (2014) indicated that the fathers who took paternal leave did challenge the idea that the mother should be the primary parent and noticed that the fathers were more involved and had a deeper sense of parenting. The results of this study also indicated that this bonding time promoted the fathers to move from being viewed as a helper in parenting to a more egalitarian parenting approach (Rehel, 2014).

Overall, the fathering role has shifted and is now being seen as more involved and nurturing. Because of this shift, fathers are now being perceived as equally competent as mothers with regard to child rearing. The question remains how these evolving views affect parents as they choose what parenting role to enter.

**Gender Roles**

It is equally important to effectively understand how gender influences decisions regarding parenting roles. In order to enhance knowledge on gender, it was imperative that gender theory is considered in how working mothers and stay-at-home fathers came to decide to enter nontraditional roles.

**Gender Theory**

**Working Mothers**

Gender role was examined to see what impact it had on making decisions for parenting roles. Working women discussed that they did take into consideration what being in a working role may insinuate to others. For example, some working mothers described their role as empowering, but wanted to make sure that this statement was not misrepresented to mean she “engaged in any masculine pursuit of power” (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 8). This clarification indicated how this type of power may challenge gender norms. The feeling of going against a gendered norm was difficult for these mothers and they felt the need to clarify its meaning.

Other working mothers discussed the feeling of being empowered and did not feel the need to clarify this meaning. These working mothers identified having a “sense of pride in their ability to transmit their progressive and egalitarian values and beliefs to their children” as well as a sense of empowerment (Dunn et al., 2011, p. 17). One explanation of this finding is that there are evolving gender ideologies toward an egalitarian approach. Although many mothers reported feeling misunderstood and judged, they still felt confident in their decisions and felt a sense of pride.

**Stay-at-Home Fathers**

Stay-at-home fathers responded differently to gender attitudes and roles. As the working mothers felt a need to clarify their decisions and reasoning, the stay-at-home fathers found more comfort in rejecting gender norms. Stay-at-home fathers had a less traditional attitude about gender roles and that this was less of a factor
in deciding to become a primary caretaker (Fischer & Anderson, 2012).

Stay-at-home fathers were also more likely than working mothers to self-define their role. These fathers gave their own definition to masculinity and rejected the gender norm regarding parenting (Rochlen, Suizzo, et al., 2008). It was also indicated that they were aware of gender stereotypes and generalizations regarding men, masculinity, and fathering and still chose to change their perception and disengage from these stereotypes. Stay-at-home fathers are choosing to define masculinity in personal and flexible terms and reject societal views (Rochlen, Suizzo, et al., 2008). When stay-at-home fathers can clearly define role, they feel “more manly by providing for their families beyond financial support,” “have a sense of pride,” and “happy to shape new masculinity norms” (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008, p. 202).

Interestingly, it was indicated that although working mothers entering nontraditional roles found it empowering, they still had a need to clarify and justify their decisions. In contrast, the stay-at-home fathers found it easier to reject gender norms and make decisions that they felt most comfortable with. These fathers did not feel limited or influenced by social norms or perceived gendered norms. Some stay-at-home fathers admitted to rejecting gendered stereotypes and felt confident about their decisions. Overall, the research indicated that gender roles are becoming more flexible, thus allowing men and women to enter nontraditional roles.

Method

A qualitative phenomenological study was utilized to explore decision making in stay-at-home father and working mother relationships. The researcher explored the experience of the stay-at-home father and working mother arrangement from the mother’s subjective experience. This design allowed the mothers to tell their stories and contribute to a better understanding of these deciding factors from the mother’s subjective experience in order to create a more universal meaning to the stay-at-home father and working mother phenomenon.

To ensure protection of the participants, this study obtained the approval of Capella University’s Institutional Review Board. All research was conducted in accordance to these policies and procedures.

Participants

Participants were married, heterosexual women with biological children aged 1 to 4 years. These women worked outside the home full time, and their husbands were the full-time caregiver for the children. Five participants were from Texas, 5 participants were recruited from Missouri, and 10 participants were recruited from Illinois, for a total of 20 participants. The majority of participants (95%) identified themselves as Caucasian. Of the 20 participants, 60% of the population reported an income of greater than $110,000. Ninety percent of the mothers were college graduates or postgraduate and 75% of the fathers held a college or postgraduate degree. Ninety-five percent of the participants reported this was a first marriage for them and their husbands. Sixty-five percent of the families reported having two children in the home. The mothers’ occupations varied; however, 25% of the participants reported being attorneys.

Data Collection

To enhance credibility of the study, field testing of the questions was done before data were collected. A list of the interview questions was prepared and submitted to a panel of experts. The panel consisted of four licensed therapists with extensive training and experience in children and family counseling. All four experts hold a doctoral degree and have a background in teaching and publishing qualitative research. The panel analyzed the questions and provided feedback on how to improve the quality of the interview questions. All feedback was taken into consideration and changes were made to the original questions.

The techniques that were used to collect data were face-to-face interviews and audio-recordings. The researcher met with the participants for face-to-face interviews at a location that was selected by and comfortable for the participant. Once the demographic and qualifications checklist was received, open-ended, unstructured questions were asked. The questions were as follows: (1) How did you and your husband come to decide he would stay at home with the children while you worked outside the home? (2) What factors influenced the decision to work full time outside of the home and your husband to stay at home as the primary caretaker of your child/children? It is important to note that these two questions were extracted from a larger study.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed by a court reporter employed by the researcher. Transcripts were then checked by the researcher against the tape-recording to ensure accuracy. Member checking was utilized to ensure accuracy. The researcher asked the participant immediately after the interview if they would agree to being contacted a minimum of 1 month following the interview. The researcher invited each participant to review the written transcripts provided by the transcriptionist following each
interview. If permission was given, the participant was contacted by e-mail. The e-mailed packet provided a transcription of their personal interview. Participants were asked to review and contribute additional material or clarify their statements. Seventeen participants took time to review and send transcription back to researcher and 2 of the 17 chose to make additional comments. Member checking is a qualitative control process where the research seeks accuracy, credibility, and validity by inviting participants to review their statements for accuracy (Creswell, 2007). This process decreases the incidence of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation of data, with the overall goal of providing findings that are authentic and original (Harper & Cole, 2012).

In this case, the researcher engaged in an in-depth member-checking protocol where each participant was e-mailed a copy of the transcript and asked for any feedback and clarification. After completing the study, each participant was contacted again and given a full copy of the final study before final submission. A total of 12 of 20 participants responded to the final submission identifying no concerns and expressing gratitude for the study.

Once interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy, the researcher began classification to identify themes. The researcher and two members of the expert panel reviewed transcripts for themes. When forming themes, the researchers and experts used interpretation. During the process of interpretation, researchers form larger meanings of what is going on in the situations (Creswell, 2007).

Finally, the transcriptions were uploaded into the qualitative software program NVivo, where the researcher was able to discover connections in the data and form consistent themes throughout the transcripts. NVivo provided security by storing the databases and files together in a single file and enabled the researcher to examine and organize the data to more efficiently search for themes (Creswell, 2007). Once themes were indicated, the expert panel and researcher reread the transcripts to ensure accuracy and thoroughness.

Results

According to Barritt (as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2005), the purpose of data analysis is to identify common themes in the personal experiences. Of the themes that emerged, the three of focus for this article are (1) creating work–family balance, (2) utilizing cost-benefit ratio, and (3) applying personality/trait strengths.

Creating Work–Family Balance

Seventy percent of the participants expressed the importance of having a balance between work and family life. A majority of the participants shared that their careers were a significant aspect in their lives and they were searching for a solution that allowed them to be career driven and at the same time provide quality family life. Some participants discussed the stress level of both parents working outside of the home as it pertained to maintaining the home and finding time for both parents to have quality time with the children if both parents chose to work outside the home. This theme was expressed in the following examples:

We were looking for more of a family work–life balance in our family so it’s actually meant a lot to us. My husband worked crazy long hours and travelled a lot previously to us making this choice. And it’s been wonderful. I used to have a lot of weight on my shoulders and I used to kind of go crazy because we were both working full-time and he had a really intense job. And so we kind of made this choice for a specific reason and it’s paid off for us. So we’re pretty thrilled about it. It’s been good. (38-Year-old mother of 2)

Overall I think it has meant a great deal in terms of being a positive for both—for our family as a whole, both in terms of our parenting, and in terms of our marriage. We have talked a lot about how much more stress we would actually be under if we were both working full-time, and I think that would put a lot of stress on our relationship as a husband and wife. I think it’s been less stressful than it could have been, um, not to say that it’s stress free, but it means a lot to have one parent home and, you know, not have to pack up the kids in the morning—wake them up, pack them up, get them in the car, get them out of the house, get them to a day care, or even, if we had a nanny to have to rush home and you can deal with who’s gonna get home that day or who’s gonna go in early one day so it’s been, I feel, it is a big bonus for us in terms of our relationship and in terms of having a parent home with the kids. (36-Year-old mother of 8-month-old twins)

I consulted and he and my daughter came with me which actually allowed us to have some really great experiences because we got to do some travelling together and it was great because then I didn’t have the stress of not having my family with me and being away from my child and being able to spend that much time with my husband. So, it was really no decision at all once we did the math and we just really looked at where our values were from our family perspective. It was very important for us to keep our nuclear family together. (39-Year-old mother of 1)

It has allowed me to fulfill all aspects of my life. Because I don’t have to worry about racing home to get to the cleaners before it closes. I don’t have to worry about racing home to pick up my children from day care. I don’t have to schedule meetings to be home at six. I might schedule meetings to be home at six because I want to. But if one runs over it’s not a crisis. So I’m very protected actually in my career life because of the situation that I have at home. So I guess if I
take it down a very singular simple terms, it’s fulfilling, it’s protected. It is—I think the primary word is fulfillment. (37-Year-old mother of 2)

Discussion of Benefit-Cost Ratio

In response to the questions regarding factors in decision making for the father to stay home and the mother work outside the home, 75% of the participants discussed weighing the cost of day care and salaries versus the benefit of having a parent as a primary caretaker of their child(ren). These participants also felt the benefit of having a parent as the primary caretaker outweighed the benefits of having a dual-earning household. This theme was expressed in the following examples:

We couldn’t afford for him to work. He would be working to send our kids to day care. When we had just the first one, we could make it work. When the second one came along, with the increase in the price of day care, we could no longer afford—like I said, we would be working to send them to day care, so we thought, well, why do that? Why spend that money for someone else to take care of the kids? He wanted to do it, so we just decided that he would stay home. Like I said, the health insurance, the benefits, you know, I had a retirement plan, he didn’t have one. (41-Year-old mother of 2)

We realized that pretty much his entire paycheck would be going to daycare if we went that route. So, leaving the baby with a stranger, the entire paycheck going to daycare, it just did not make any sense at all. And so, my husband was completely open to the idea of trying out being a stay-at-home dad. That was probably the biggest factor for us, was just the money situation because like I said his entire paycheck would have gone to daycare and that just didn’t make sense. (33-Year-old mother of 2)

The salary discrepancy was enormous. I think I earn like 20 times what he was earning. The job he had just paid so little that it wouldn’t even have covered childcare, why pay someone else to watch your kids when the money he would bring as an income wouldn’t even cover it. So he should be there at home with the kids. We feel it’s better for the kids to have a parent at home rather than . . . just to have a parent at home, we feel it’s really beneficial to them. (34-Year-old mother of 2)

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Applying Personal Preference/Trait Strengths

With regard to a person’s strengths and preferences, 50% of the participants acknowledged that this was a factor in deciding which parent would stay home as the primary caretaker. They discussed how they worked with their partner to decide who would be a better-suited parent to stay home. Four of the participants shared that this was a discussion early on in their relationship. Many mothers felt this was a collaborative decision that focused on their individual strengths, which helped in supporting each other in the defined roles. Some of the word choices the participants used to describe this theme were “better suited,” “personality wise, it was decided,” “better at,” and “recognition of strengths.” This theme was expressed in the following examples:

It’s really something we always had kind of plan to do. It’s something we talked about for years before. Maybe even since before we got married. I don’t know when we had our first conversation about it but certainly very early on in the marriage that if when we had kids would not be great if he could stay home, and he expressed that interest. I think he just made it really a priority that it’s something he wanted to do personally. (38-Year-old mother of 2)

Two things: it is recognition of our strengths and that we talked about that concept very early on, dating. I was very clear that I wanted a career and I didn’t want to stay at home with children. . . . He said “I love children, I want to have a bunch of kids.” But it was really in the formative stages of our relationship that we first started sort of talking about it. . . . My decision to work outside the home was almost like a non-decision. His decision to work full time in the house is something that he does with a lot of ease. And quite frankly it’s—the decision plays to my strengths and it plays to his strengths. (37-Year-old mother of 2)

Frankly, I think we felt like he was maybe more well-suited to being home. It’s just his personality even though I might have been more experienced with spending time with children and things like that. We felt like maybe he would manage the household and manage being at home with a child probably a little bit better than I would. (31-Year-old mother of 1)

Discussion

Creating Work–Family Balance

Seventy percent of the mothers reported feeling a better balance between their two roles of mother and employee. These mothers discussed the importance of both roles and how the stay-at-home father and working mother arrangement has helped establish better boundaries in their roles. This is consistent with the findings by Paré and Dillaway (2005) who reported that women are showing success in negotiating boundaries for the roles of motherhood and paid work, which allows them to maintain both social roles.

Another finding with regard to work–family balance was that the mothers felt more equality with their spouses and more supported. This is consistent with the study by Perrone, Wright, and Jackson (2009), who reported that changes in work roles often lead to changes in marital roles, which can affect marital satisfaction. Decision-making skills, division
of labor, and fairness are crucial factors related to marital satisfaction when roles are changed. Couples who discuss these issues and negotiate equitable solutions are more likely to have higher marital satisfaction.

The mothers in this study met their needs of maintaining their careers and/or growing in their careers. One way they were able to feel more productive at work was knowing their children were well taken care of. They discussed feeling more secure in maintaining their job since they had a parent home to be in charge of any family issues that arose, such as an ill child or school functions. Many described feeling at peace knowing their child(ren) were taken care of so they could concentrate better at work, thus allowing their time at home to be involved in activities and care-taking of their children. This is a similar finding to a study by Fischer and Anderson (2012), who assessed stay-at-home fathers and their reasons for making this decision. The researchers indicated that the fathers were influenced by their partner’s career dedication and earning potential. These fathers felt supported by their partners in the decision to become stay-at-home fathers and the fathers shared they were supportive of their wives’ career dedication (Fischer & Anderson, 2012).

This is also consistent with the study of Dunn et al. (2011) who interviewed working mothers on their experiences. One question asked about the advantages of the stay-at-home father and working mother relationship. The broad theme reflected a work–family balance as they described more family time and an improved home environment (Dunn et al., 2011). The second theme expressed in this study was that the decision allowed for more flexibility and freedom in their work life. Both of these themes are consistent with the current findings.

**Utilizing Cost-Benefit Ratio**

Seventy-five percent of the participants discussed the benefit and importance of having a parent as a primary caretaker and weighed the cost of a parent working and cost of day care. Parents are working together to identify what arrangement will work best for their family and are not focused on what society believes is right for them. This is consistent with Eshleman and Bulcroft’s (2006) finding that men and women are beginning the movement of escaping their traditional gender roles and choosing to take on roles that promote equality.

The participants of this study shared that the benefits of having a parent as the primary caretaker outweighed having a dual-earning household. This is also consistent with the study by Merla (2008) who was interested in why families choose nontraditional roles. She found that many fathers wanted to see their kids grow and wanted to give their children a rich and solid relationship, which they felt was priority in quality of life and that it was the parents’ job to be primary caregivers and worked to have an egalitarian approach in their family system (Merla, 2008). This is consistent in the benefits of having a stay-at-home parent and working parent relationship.

A study by Fischer and Anderson (2012) assessed reasons why stay-at-home fathers chose this role. This researcher identified that finances were a contributing factor. This study shared one participant’s view, “With what I can make at work fulltime, putting my boy in daycare meant I’d be working less than $2 an hour—not worth it” (p. 25). Although this was not a significant finding for Fischer and Anderson, it is a similar finding that stay-at-home fathers are taking into consideration the financial aspect of this arrangement.

This finding is also consistent with the study by Dunn et al. (2011) who interviewed mothers on their experiences. One question asked to identify reasons of entering the workforce and the father becoming primary caretaker. Majority of participants answered that economics was a primary reason. They described this as having more earning power. Another question that was asked was to identify the advantages of this family dynamic. A common theme regarding advantages was that their values were upheld. They described how having a parent as primary caretaker was important and that the benefit outweighed the cost.

**Applying Personality Strengths**

Fifty percent of the participants acknowledged that preferences and strengths were a major part of the decision. This is consistent with the study by Fischer and Anderson (2002) where they assessed stay-at-home fathers and the reasons they chose to stay home. This study identified that the most important reason was their desire to be primary caregiver. This theme was expanded to include having a personality that is better suited to staying home (Fischer & Anderson, 2002).

This finding is also consistent with the study by Dunn et al. (2011). The study by Dunn et al. (2011) was a qualitative exploratory study that examined the adjustment experiences regarding the stay-at-home father and working mother relationship, from the mother’s perspective. When asked about primary reasons for entering this dynamic, a common response was that the partner was better suited. This was discussed by sharing about their partner’s parenting strengths, as well as their own reservations of being a primary caretaker. This is consistent with the findings of relying on personality strengths and preferences in the current study.

**Limitations**

There are a few delimiting factors to this study. This study did not allow for fathers’ participation and only
explored the mother’s view. It is important to note that this is a delimitation given that the decision making was dyadic in nature.

Another delimitation regarding participants was the required demographics. All participants must have had at least one child between the ages of 1 and 4 years. This does not allow the researcher to analyze if responsibilities and roles differ based on the age and developmental needs of the child. They study also required all couples to be married, heterosexual couples. Same-sex or cohabitating couples were not included.

Age, income, and education level were not specifically required demographics, it is important to note that majority of participants had high levels of education, affluence, and were aged between 30 and 40 years. Although 60% of the participants identified an income level of $110,000 or higher, this is not representative of the stay-at-home father and working mother population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), only 28% of this population identified an income level of 100,000 or higher.

Finally, a limitation was exposed due to the method of recruitment of participants for the study. All participants responded to online postings for recruitment. Therefore, this limited those that do not have access to Internet or those that were not connected to support groups specific to the stay-at-home father and working mother dynamic. This could have been more representative of families who are receiving more social support by being a part of a blog or group that supports these roles (Rushing & Powell, 2014).

Future Research

Given the nature of this study, there are many areas to expand for future research. This study only explores the mother’s perspective on how the decision was made to enter into the working mother and stay-at-home father arrangement. Future studies should explore the father’s perspective on the decision-making process. It would also be interesting to include both members of the couple in the study.

Another area to expand research is to analyze social support. It would be interesting to see if the level of social support from friends, family, and society makes a difference in the decision-making process. Some of these participants indicated a belief that society does not adequately understand their arrangement and feel an overall lack of support for their families. This was consistent with Latshaw’s (2011) findings where stay-at-home fathers reported “difficulty being accepted into mother’s playgroups or felt awkward asking mother to hang out one-on-one, therefore, many reported spending long hours at home without adult interaction” and thus contemplated returning to the workforce (p. 137). Therefore, there is a gap in research regarding social support and the need for more understanding regarding nontraditional parenting roles.

Conclusion

It is imperative that family professionals, as well as society, have an adequate understanding of the context of the decision to enter this arrangement. As changes in dynamics occur, so do associated expectations; uncertainty around expectations may contribute to distress in families. Having a better understanding of this phenomena may leave family professionals better equipped for working with working mother, stay-at-home father families. By having this understanding, family professionals can clarify expectations, normalize, and reduce distress in families navigating this decision. Because of the continually evolving nature of the workforce, parents are in the position to consider multiple factors when making decisions about parenting and income earning roles. The participants of this study made decisions about entering into this arrangement based on practical reasons rather than gender role. This is an important finding as it provides a better understanding of parenting, work, and gender roles.

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