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From Breadwinner to Breadmaker: The Experiences of Stay- at- Home Fathers in Ireland Today

Eoin O'Brien

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“From Breadwinner to Breadmaker: The experiences of stay-at-home fathers in Ireland today”

By

Eoin O’Brien

B.A. (Hons) in Social Care

Supervisor: Mairead Seymour

Submitted to the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology, in partial fulfilment of the requirements leading to the award of M.A. in Child, Family and Community Studies.

DECLARATION OF OWNERSHIP

This Dissertation is submitted to the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology, in partial fulfilment of the requirements leading to the award of Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies.

I declare that the work contained in this project is my own and that all sources used have been acknowledged as required by the Institute.

Signed: _____

Eoin O'Brien

Date: _____

27th September 2012

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Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the six men who graciously took part in this study, without whom it could not have taken place.

ABSTRACT

The experience and views of men who have become stay-at-home fathers has been an area of research that has, only in recent decades, become popular to study. This study highlights that there is a dearth of literature from an Irish perspective and that little is known about the topic. Internationally, research has shown that there appears to be a strong link between masculine identity and the realm of paid employment. It also shows that fathers struggle in their attempts to balance being *involved fathers* while maintaining a foothold in paid employment. The literature highlights that stay-at-home fathers begin to break down traditional notions that the domestic sphere is solely the domain of women. Findings from semi-structured interviews are presented and discussed showing that the experiences of stay-at-home fathers have a dramatic impact on fathers' emotions. It also highlighted that, although the fathers felt them being at home was extremely beneficial to the father/child relationship, they had a strong desire to return to paid employment. Stay-at-home fathers appear to struggle with a renegotiation of their role within their family with many having had little experience of 'caring' tasks prior to this time. Recommendations are presented in view of the current research and the findings of this study.

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study sheds light on the experiences of stay-at-home fathers, until recently a relatively unseen, group within Irish society. Over the last four years, Ireland has experienced a significant downturn in its economy with resultant job losses for the adult population. Figures released by the Central Statistics Office in Dublin paint a grim picture on the current state of the labour market in Ireland. While both sexes have been hit by this economic recession it appears from the statistical data that men have been affected disproportionately when compared to their female counterparts. In the period 2007 – 2011 the number of men in employment dropped dramatically from 1,171,900 to 954,541, while for women over the same period the drop was much less significant having dropped from 858,100 to 852,819.

With regard to policy, there has been a clear push towards a link between family life and work throughout Europe and Ireland. This push has been targeted mostly at mothers who are encouraged to enter into the workforce while maintaining the vast majority of the caregiving duties. Daly & Clever (2009) note that "... the situation of fathers and the role of policy in promoting 'active fatherhood' need to receive a prominent place in policymaking" (p. 12). They continue that policy has traditionally focused solely on the financial aspect of childrearing and has neglected the area of services to families. In Ireland, there has been a distinct lack of focus on the part of policymakers in developing policies which encourage, and support men to become more involved in the care of their family either in the realm of income policy or in other social policy domains.

In this study the views and experiences of six stay-at-home fathers were gathered through the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The interviews highlighted areas of particular interest including the emotional impact of being a stay-at-home father and the complete lack of awareness of the role prior to undertaking it. Due to the small sample size, it is not possible to make broad generalisations and as such the views expressed should not be taken as being representative of all stay-at-home fathers. Nevertheless, the study provides a detailed account of the perspectives of six stay-at-home fathers living in Ireland and provides a starting point from which to develop further study in this under-explored area of research.

This chapter begins by defining the term *stay-at-home father* followed by an outline of the aims and objectives of the study, the rationale for the study and an overview of each chapter of the dissertation.

1.2 Definition of key terms

For the purposes of this study, the term *stay-at-home father* will be used to describe a father who is the primary caregiver for his children and who may, or may not, be involved in some form of paid employment. This father is in a heterosexual relationship in which the mother and partner is the primary earner or is in full-time study.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The aim of this dissertation to gain an insight into the experiences and views of fathers who are the primary caregivers for their children.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The key objectives of this study are:

- To understand how stay-at-home fathers view their role within their family;
- To gain an insight into the emotional impact of becoming and/or being stay-at-home fathers; and
- To investigate the different types of supports stay-at-home fathers use as coping strategies.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

As mentioned above the economic recession which began in 2008 has given rise to a serious unemployment problem in Ireland. This phenomenon has disproportionately affected men and there has been a corresponding increase in the number of men who are now the primary caregivers for their children. A review of the literature highlights that from an international

perspective, it is only in the last decade or so that researchers have begun to focus attention on fathers who are the primary caregivers for their children (Doucet, 2004; Doucet & Merla, 2007; Kelley & Kelley, 2007). However, this research has found that there is a lack of research and information on the topic in Ireland, including how such men negotiate their masculinity in a realm traditionally the preserve of the mother.

It is hoped that this study will open the door for more research to be carried out in the area, continuing to break down the traditional gender norms that have existed in Ireland to date. As a lesser studied subject, the researcher hopes that this study will give an insight into men's lives in their role and lead to an improvement in family policy that supports a range of diverse childcare arrangements such as shared caring or stay-at-home father households. It may also lead to a better understanding of the relationship between fathers and their children and the challenges faced by fathers who grapple with their desire to return to paid employment and their desire to be more involved in their children's lives.

1.6 Outline of the Study

Chapter Two reviews the current literature corresponding to the research topic. This chapter will discuss the concept of masculinity and masculine identity, as well as highlighting current findings related to men as fathers and stay-at-home fathers, in particular. Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) is presented which demonstrates the dramatic increase in the number of fathers who are 'looking after home/family'. It discusses the ingrained traditional notions that caregiving can only be carried out by women, and presents findings to suggest that while society is becoming more open to accepting different family forms, there is still a long way to go.

Chapter Three presents the methodological approach undertaken in this study. It outlines the aim of the study and the data collection methods used. It will also discuss how and why the sample was selected and how the data was analysed. Ethical considerations and limitations are also presented in this chapter.

Chapters Four and Five respectively present the findings and discussion. The different themes which emerged throughout the data will be presented and discussed along with

supporting quotations from the narratives. Four core themes are presented drawing from in-depth and detailed analysis of the study data and the international research.

Chapter Six will conclude this study with a brief summary of the complete research study identifying key conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There has been an increasing interest in the last decade or so into examining the area of fatherhood in general (Lamb, 1997; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000; Gregory & Milner, 2008; Featherstone, 2009). This work has centred on differing, yet related, areas concerning fathers and the notion of fatherhood such as care work, fathering, masculinity, work-life balance and domestic labour. In the more recent past, researchers have broadened their locus of interest to include a relatively new, and thus emerging, role that fathers' are beginning to undertake – that of the stay-at-home father (Chesley, 2011; Latshaw, 2009, 2011; Kelley & Kelley, 2007; Doucet & Merla, 2007; Doucet, 2004; Bridges, Etaigh & Barnes-Farrell, 2002). As outlined in Chapter One, the term *stay-at-home father* is described as a male who is the primary carer, spending the vast majority of the day, or week, in a parenting role in a particular household where he is co-parenting with the mother. This male can also be in some form of paid, or unpaid, employment.

2.2 Masculinity

Ferguson (2001) notes that, hegemonic Irish masculinity has been heavily based around the heterosexual male as a good family man, and a male breadwinner. This is in contrast to what was seen as the role of the women which was to be a mother and be engaged in household duties. Ní Laoire (2005) proposes that this form of hegemonic masculinity was centred around, and closely policed by, the (Catholic) Church, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and "... constitutional legislation that enshrined the sanctity of heterosexual marriage and the family unity" (p. 663). This may have been what Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) define as an idealized form of masculinity which was "... exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state." (p. 838).

In their study of Irish masculinity, Johnston & Morrison (2007) found that the vast majority of research participants had difficulty in expressing what for them constituted masculinity and many relied on the descriptions which alluded to men's sporting activities. They also found that participants described femininity in terms of emotion, sensitivity and sophistication, whereas masculinity was described in terms of childishness and immaturity.

They concluded that the male participants felt that they were expected to act, or portray, their gender as *men* in different ways and at different times depending on the social situation they are faced with. This is a term Johnston & Morrison (2007) define as *contextual masculine presentation*. An example of this may be a situation where a male is interacting with other male peers and may portray himself in more traditional or hegemonic masculine ways. Whereas, in the company of his girlfriend he may present himself as being more thoughtful and affectionate. Johnston & Morrison (2007) stipulate that this same male, when in the company of his male peers and his girlfriend, may abandon these presentations for a completely different one all of which is dependent on the social context in which the male finds himself.

Moller (2007), in his critique of hegemonic masculinity, notes that by

“... extrapolating from the local and particular, positivist arguments see in men’s actions a pattern. This strategy is clearly problematic as it ignores the many ways in which culture and context actively shape how masculinity is performed and experienced” (p. 267).

Moller (2007) suggests that the positivist perspective depicts masculinity as stable in all circumstances, and as such universalises masculinity as men and imposes a culturally specific notion of masculinity on our appreciation of men’s *and* women’s lives.

Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) write that the concept of a hegemonic masculinity first came into being in the mid-1980’s and it was “... understood as the pattern of practice... that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue.” (p. 832). Stroud (2009) points out that the concept of hegemonic masculinity can lead to some difficulty in interpreting men’s (and women’s) part in society. She questions whether, when hegemonic masculinity is enacted, all men are hegemonic or only some. The rationale behind her paper, *How Do We Know Hegemonic Masculinity When We See It?*, is to discover what hegemonic masculinity actually is. It has been suggested that the hegemonic masculinity not only generates dominance over women, but also dominance over other forms of masculinity, or other subordinate masculinities such as gay men or men who are staying at home to care for family

members and look after the household (Demetriou, 2001). Brandth & Kvande (1998) point out that masculinity, and indeed femininity, are in a continuous state of flux and are constructed in a context of unequal and shifting power relations. This continuous state of flux, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) conclude, is evidence that masculinity does not only represent one type of man, but rather, it is a way in which men position themselves through discursive practices. Men can portray the hegemonic masculinity in one particular situation and in another can resist this form of masculinity, as suggested by the research carried out by Johnston & Morrison (2007). While not specifically writing in respect of hegemonic masculinity, Seidler (1997) notes that it is up to heterosexual men to change their attitudes and behaviour towards themselves *and* towards women, gay men and lesbians. The same could be said for all (or perceived) subordinate masculinities in society today.

Traditionally masculine identity has been studied with regard to men's work outside the home and, as a result, paid employment is a major part of a man's identity (Doherty et al., 1998; Castelain-Meunier, 2002; Kelley & Kelley, 2007; Chesley, 2011). There are two situations in particular where masculinity, in its traditional sense, can be challenged – where men are unemployed (or not the primary earner), and where men have entered a traditionally female area of employment such as childcare/nursing (Morgan, 1992, as cited in Brandth & Kvande, 1998). Brandth & Kvande (1998) also suggest that in western societies, such as Ireland, hegemonic masculinity is very closely "... associated with income generating work, and income generating work is considered a central source of masculine identity." (p. 296). Anderson (2005) notes that men who thrive in middle- and upper-class jobs and, are the main wage earner in their families, among other traits, are producing and reinforcing the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. She continues:

"It is not, of course, necessary for these patterns to represent the personalities, interests, and characteristics of an actual majority of men in society, rather these patterns need only be represented and reinforced as the exemplar of 'real men'" (2005, p. 3)

Thébaud (2000) highlights that, despite the fact that many households are now dual-earner households, much research has suggested that there still remains a strong link between being a breadwinner and a man's identity. Given that masculinity and its association to work are

closely linked, it is interesting to note that when a man (in a male-female relationship) earns less than his partner, he does less housework than a man who earns the same as, or more than, his partner (ibid). Thébaud (2000) proposes one explanation for this being that "... when men are in counter-normative situations... they reinforce their masculinity by *not* engaging in feminine activities, such as housework." (p. 335).

Stroud (2009) highlights that popular culture, in particular country music in the United States, continues to espouse the gendered nature of housework and family life and men's inability to cope when they are thrown into non-normative situations, such as looking after children and the household on a full-time basis. These songs are an example of hegemonic masculinity being constructed in order to express wideheld ideas, fantasies, and desires that do not necessarily conform to the the actual lives of men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). When it comes to family, Stroud (2009) notes that in many societies patriarchal gender roles are seen as moral and healthy for individuals, including the "natural" expression of these norms in heterosexuality, and are framed as being moral and healthy for society (p. 8). Lorber (2010) notes that gender roles are changing and will continue to do so throughout time, with fathers are beginning to take care of their children more so than in the past. This change has been recognised in the public shere, with recent media articles highlighting that there are fathers are now looking after their children full-time in the home (Duffy, 2012; Wayman, 2011; Reynolds, 2011; Caren, 2009).

2.3 Men as Fathers

It is imperative to give some socio-historical context to the roles and expectations fathers have taken on over the centuries in order to best understand the current context in which men are parenting (La Rossa et al. 1991, cited in Dienhart, 1998). We need to know where we have come from before we can know where we are going. According to the structural-functional perspective, the father was initially viewed as the "instrumental leader" of the household, with this progressing to viewing the father as a "good provider" or a *breadwinner* for his family, while the mother provided all the other needs for the household. In their examination of the culture of fatherhood, Wall and Arnold (2007) noted that fatherhood is

regarded somewhat as a secondary occupation for men and that their primary role is to provide financially for their family.

Walters (2011) points out that the role of the father has changed dramatically throughout the course of history with the father has moving from being the “caveman”, where gender roles were quite specific, to one where the “new man” has emerged with the subsequent blurring of gender roles (p. 32). Dienhart (1998) notes that throughout the discourse on parenting, there has been an ingrained assumption that parenting is essentially about ‘mothering’, no matter if it is a man or woman carrying it out, and that men will not be able to handle the primary care-giver tasks that a stay-at-home mother will.

What has been lacking historically is a view into the private, family lives of men and their subsequent roles as both fathers and husbands. Mintz (1998) argues that although historically men’s lives have been recorded, this recording has been of their public lives. He further contends that men’s work relationships have helped shape their status and role in the family, much like they have shaped women’s status, role and self-image. Writing from an American perspective, Crouter (1994) notes that there has been a steady increase in the number of women who are taking up employment outside of the home, and that the group of women experiencing the greatest increase are mothers who have children aged less than one year.

Similarly, Ireland has experienced a trend whereby there are increasing numbers of women seeking paid employment outside of the home, with latest figures showing that some 53.3% of women were in paid employment in 2011, an increase of 5.2% from 2001. There has also been a narrowing of the gap in labour force participation between men and women in the same period, from 23.6% to 15.1% (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2012). This is particularly important to be aware of when Featherstone (2009) writes that the extent to which fathers become involved in the raising of their children is very much dependent on maternal beliefs and the mother’s assessment of its benefits. O’Brien (2005) further suggests that studies assessed the impact of fathers’ involvement in the early years and the children’s subsequent outcomes, confirm the importance of early involvement by the father in the caring of his young children. The degree of ‘maternal gate-keeping’ could be seen in a United

Kingdom study carried out by Leach, Barnes, Nichlos, Goldin, Stein, Sylva and Malmberg (2006) in the United Kingdom, which found that less than one percent of the mothers surveyed had considered their partners to be the primary carer of their children, placing this option at the bottom of their potential child care list. The vast majority said that ideally, they would like to be caring for their children themselves.

In recent years, there has been a move towards viewing the role of the father as central to the development of his child/children and a move away from viewing this role as being on the periphery. Dienhart (1998) notes that the study of men in families has moved away from solely looking upon them as providers (financially) for their families, to “a current interest in the complex and diverse ways men contribute to, are potentially challenged by, and benefit from fatherhood experiences” (p. 19). Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson (1998, p. 278) write that the term “responsible fathering” with its implicit link to providing financially for the family, was first introduced by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Latshaw (2011) critiques this term, noting that the link stands to reinforce the socially constructed notion of the breadwinner father in society today. However, she fails to acknowledge the concluding paragraph of Doherty et al. (1998) whereby they allude to the fact that policy makers are in a position to strengthen the relationship between a father and his children. Doherty et al. (1998) clearly state that fathers should not be forced to enter paid employment, but should that supports be there, fathers may feel they need to avail of them. All this they feel would enhance fathering in general:

“Fathering can be enhanced through programs and policies that help fathers relate to their coparent, that foster employment and economic opportunities *if needed*, that change institutional expectations and practices to better support fathers, and that encourage fathers’ personal commitment to their children.” (p. 290, *emphasis added by this author*).

Lamb (1998) notes that for social historians and researchers, as well as students of social science, they must acknowledge the roles and responsibilities of fathers within the family of the past, and assess them in their own context. He continues that, although contemporary study has shifted many times, most researchers recognise that fatherhood should not be

looked at as a singular act, but as a vast array of roles and tasks undertaken each day by the male parent in the household.

Marsiglio (1995) points out that the contributions of social scientists to the area of fatherhood will not only have implications for fathers, but also for children, mothers, and the family unit as a whole. These findings will be as "... varied and extensive..." as the differing research being undertaken (p. 20). With regard to the father/child relationship, Gatrell (2007) found that the men in her study held a high regard for the father/child relationship and that "many fathers strove to negotiate an involved role" with younger children and became irritated if circumstances prevented them from attaining this (p. 360). She also found that some of the fathers had made conscious "career compromises" in order to be more present in the upbringing (p. 361). By making such decisions in relation to their employment and parenting, these fathers are taking steps into a realm that has been traditionally seen as the place of the mother.

Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine (1985, as cited in Doherty et al., 1999) proposed a four-factor model of father involvement. They point out that if the father is highly motivated, has adequate parenting skills, receives the required social support, and is not undermined by work or other institutional settings, his involvement will be more forthcoming. This involvement is determined by the skills, and self-confidence, and motivation *of* the father, and the supports and institutional practices *given to/present around* the father. It is proposed that the factors for father involvement do not work independently of each other, but can be influenced by one another. This has implications for those fathers who may feel undermined in their role if they have lost their job or feel let down by institutions of the State, as a result of this.

Coultrane (1997) points out that there has been, and will continue to be, a shift in the gender roles within households as society moves forward. In carrying out research into gender roles and meanings in relation to household chores and child care, Kroska (2003) noted that there has been little research carried out into the meaning of two of the tasks/chores traditionally carried out by men – namely "auto work" and "yard work", such as fixing the family car or painting the garden shed. She posits that just as women use traditionally feminine chores to

display their gender, men may just as well use these ‘typically’ male tasks to display their masculine identity “... and perhaps care for their families” (p. 458). This is somewhat similar to Coultrane (1996) who found that fathers carried out more tasks related to the physical upkeep of the house than women did, such as *household repairs*, *car maintenance*, *cleaning rain gutters* and *mowing the lawn*. He also found that woman did the vast majority of the household tasks such as those related to cooking, cleaning and clothing.

With regard to contemporary society, Anderson (2005) describes that it promotes the notion that a father should be involved in his children’s lives and play an active role in their upbringing. She describes the “nurturant father” as possessing certain qualities that help maintain an intimate and expressive relationship with children such as being involved with his children not just as older children but as infants, as well as taking part in the general daily activities such as the feeding and washing of his children (p. 4). Overall, men appear to be contributing more and more toward their responsibilities in relation to direct caring for their children than was the case in the past.

As such, Dienhart (1998) argues that men seem to assert new “claims” on certain parts of the parenting repertoire “... expanding their vision both to feel and to enact fully the fatherhood part of the shared parenting dance” (p. 180). Cabrera et al. (2000) found that, there had been little research or interest into the roles of fatherhood or about what it means to be a father. They point out that the father, moreso than the mother, has had discretion “... in defining their parental roles and responsibilities...” (p. 131). Despite the move away from seeing fathers as primarily *breadwinners*, evidence exists that shows that men experience a form of tension between the need to continue this role and their aspirations to be a more *involved* father (Hatter, Vinter & Williams, 2002).

Wall and Arnold (2007) found that the supports available to fathers, however limited their existence, appear to view fathers as secondary carers for their children. A contemporary example of this relates to groups for parents and toddlers which are most commonly termed ‘Mother and Toddler’ Groups. It is recognised however, that efforts have been made to re-brand them as ‘Parent and Toddler’ Groups in recent years (Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

County Council, 2012). While not specifically relating to fathers, social supports have a direct influence on parenting, through help given in numerous differing forms through childcare, and also indirectly by helping to reduce associated stress. In order to allow parents to allocate more of their energies into caring for their children, it can be beneficial for them to get help with other tasks (cleaning, feeding) from family or friends.

Sheppard (2008), in his study on the use of social support as a parental coping strategy, found that the vast majority of mothers saw social support as an important factor in their coping strategies. This was received overwhelmingly through informal means provided by family, friends and acquaintances rather than through formal structures.

2.4 Stay-at-home Fathers

The notion of the father being the primary care-giver appears somewhat alien to modern society. This can be accounted for by the rather rigid separation of roles along gender lines that occurred post World War One and Two. These are what became referred to as “traditional” gender roles. Today, the cohort of men who are the primary carers for their children is very small and has been little researched (Leach, 2009). The reasons for men becoming the stay-at-home parent in their families are varied. They can be influenced by factors such as a couples current employment situation and relative earning power, the absence of acceptable alternative child care, perceptions of societal values, maternal and paternal health, family history and ideological values (West, Lewis, Barnes, Leach, Sylva & Stein, 2008).

The vast majority of men are more likely to become care-givers to infant children as opposed to older ones, with this particularly being the case when the mother returns to paid employment outside of the home (Leach, 2009). Dienhart writes that focusing attention on men who are the primary parents in a relationship can help give us a greater insight into exploring alternatives to the dominant, or hegemonic, discourses about men’s “... taken-for-granted privilege to spend less time than women [on] family work.” (1998, p. 26). In relation to a man’s adjustment to being the primary carer/parent, having a mother who engaged in the

paid workforce seemed to be a salient factor in his successful adjustment (Radin, 1988, as cited in Dienhart, 1998).

In contrast to men's traditional role of *breadwinner*, it has been found that men get greater satisfaction from their involvement in family life than work life, despite the increase in stress experienced in doing so (Miller, 2011). It has been noted that there is a need for researchers to document, and take account of, the 'how', 'what' and 'why' women and men reproduce, break, or go beyond the bounds of current established gender norms (Björnberg & Kollind, 2005, as cited in Miller, 2011). Kelley & Kelley (2007) discovered, contrary to their original hypothesis, that men are more willing to engage, and seek-out, alternative employment opportunities to full-time work:

“...looking at what men actually do we would expect full-time work to be by far the most popular with other options barely considered where as in reality many options come in fairly close together with no universal favorite [sic].” (p. 13).

At-home father/breadwinner mother households¹ are very rare and they represent an atypical family form (Chesley, 2011). According to the latest figures released by the CSO in *Women and Men in Ireland 2011*, there has been an almost seventy percent increase in the number of men 'looking after home/family' in the period 2001 to 2011 (5,700 and 9,600 respectively). In the same period, there has been a decrease of some 8.7 percent with respect to women 'looking after family/home'. Some of the increase in the number of men in this particular category could be explained by the aforementioned decline in employment opportunities associated with the collapse of the economy in Ireland in the last number of years.

Anecdotally, in situations where the woman has greater earning potential, some couples may find it more financially beneficial for the man to stay at home 'looking after home/family' while the woman goes out to work. This was found to be the case for some of the participants in a study carried out by Doucet (2004) which focused on a sample of 120 fathers

¹ This refers to households in which the father is the primary caregiver for the children while the mother is engaged in paid employment outside the home.

in Canada. While the total number of men in Ireland classified as ‘unemployed’ has dramatically increased from 66,800 in 2001, to 250,00 in 2011, there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of men classified in this category from 71.3 percent to 69.7 percent, respectively. This may be as a result of people emigrating from the country in search of employment elsewhere.

One of the sectors hit most by the economic downturn over the last number of years has been the building and construction industry. The number of males working in this sector over the last two years has fallen drastically from 118,800 in January to March 2010 to some 96,100 in the same period in 2012. The figure of 96,100 is slightly higher than the low of 90,700 experienced in 2008 at the beginning of the economic collapse (CSO, 2012). It is difficult to gain accurate figures in Ireland as to the exact number of men who are now stay-at-home fathers as the criteria used by the CSO to classify individuals with regard to their employment status is by self-reporting. This may lead some men to report themselves as ‘unemployed’ as opposed to ‘looking after family/home’ because they may not actually see themselves in the role even though they may be carrying out many of the household tasks that would justify them being included in such a category.

Doucet’s (2004) study of men who had ‘traded cash for care’ found that stay-at-home fathers still maintain a foothold in the world of work. Many of the fathers she interviewed continued to have a connection to paid work, either through working part-time, studying part-time, or taking time out of working to find a new line of employment. It has been posited that this is in some way similar to the differing pathways taken by mothers “as they [fathers] seek to find creative ways of combining work and caring” (Doucet, 2004, p. 287). She also highlights the ambiguity surrounding the term ‘stay-at-home father’ in that most fathers mix diverse configurations of “home, paid and unpaid work, and community work.” (p. 295). With respect to stay-at-home fathers in Canada and Belgium, Doucet & Merla (2007) discovered cross-cultural similarities in that both sets of fathers “engage in innovative forms of masculinities that are neither complicit, nor subordinate, nor hegemonic” but portray far more diverse and defiant discourses and practices (p. 468).

Likewise, Latshaw (2011) posits that pressure from social and cultural expectations which link masculinity and fatherhood with *providing* could make full-time fathers even more likely to try and find some type of employment. They may still identify themselves as a stay-at-home parent during this process. She also calls for a complete renegotiation of the term 'stay-at-home' and what it means in relation to both fathers and mothers, proposing that there is a need to re-evaluate it in light of the differing expectations of 'stay-at-home' fathers and mothers. Questions why a father (in a Canadian context) who works a small number of hours a week and cares for his children the rest of the week is not classified as 'stay-at-home' should be addressed. She continues:

“Perhaps the term “stay-at-home parenthood” has become antiquated in a society where mothers and fathers pursue and balance multiple identities and responsibilities daily.” (Latshaw, 2011, p. 144).

Some stay-at-home fathers may feel 'put out' by the actual term, while others will see it as very matter of fact. Latshaw (2011) found that some of the fathers had difficulty in defining themselves as 'stay-at-home' and discussed their current circumstances in relation to work. Others found that they were in a state of constant shift with regard to their identity depending on who they are speaking to.

Many stay-at-home fathers renegotiate their role within the family unit and reassess their views on the importance of daily care (cleaning, cooking, caring, homework) even when this particular role is not the chosen path for the father. This may, in part, be due to a realignment of the societal views which now emphasise involved fathering (Chesley, 2011). This possible shift in societal views was not evident in Doucet's (2004) work on stay-at-home fathers whereby many of those fathers internalised the view that, by staying at home, they were not being 'a good man' and that many men *and* their partners felt pressure to conform to traditional gender norms. When a man undertakes the role of a stay-at-home parent he:

“not only [assumes] traditionally feminine aspects of domestic work and childcare, they also add their voices to a large chorus of generations of women who have argued for the valuing of unpaid work.” (Doucet & Merla, 2007, p. 468)

With regard to the amount of time a father spends on ‘parental time’ (classified as ‘Care time’, ‘Housework time’, ‘Social and Leisure activities’ and ‘Transportation time’) Pailhé and Solaz (2008), found that fathers who were not working still carried out less ‘parenting’ time than mothers who were working.

Leach (2009) notes that there is a dearth of literature available in relation to the outcomes for children who are cared for by stay-at-home fathers while the mother works or studies, and there is certainly no empirical evidence that it is less beneficial than if the mother were to stay-at-home. What is known is that there are benefits for babies and young toddlers in having one parent at home full-time, and that all the criteria that go to make up a ‘good enough’ parent can come from a father as much as they can come from a mother.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the relevant literature and research in the broad areas of *Masculinity*, *Men as Fathers* and *Stay-at-home Fathers*. From this, it is possible to conclude that there is relative dearth of literature on the experiences of men who have found themselves in the position of looking after their children on a full-time basis. There are numerous pieces of literature written in relation to fathers and fathering. However, much of this has focused on the father being a distant, if not absent, figure. This study hopes to gain an insight into the world of those *involved* and *present* fathers who have decided to care for their children while their partners continue in paid employment or study, and by doing so begin to fill the gap in research particularly from an Irish perspective.

The literature presented has informed the following chapter which presents the research design and methodological approach underpinning the study.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of stay-at-home fathers. This particular study included four participants who did not actively choose to be stay-at-home fathers and two others who made the choice along with their wives to be stay-at-home fathers. Emphasis throughout this study is put on discovering how these men define, interpret, manage and, cope with, their role as a stay-at-home father. In this chapter, the sample used in the study is outlined, including how participants were chosen and the data collection methods employed. Following this, the data analysis process is discussed, as well as any ethical considerations that were considered when carrying out the research. The chapter concludes with an examination of the limitations of this particular study.

3.2 Research Methodology

Sarantakos (1998) notes that, qualitative research is extremely broad in both form and theoretical framework, which helps make this type of research rich, diverse and pluralistic. Qualitative research “... is concerned with collecting and analysing information in as many forms, chiefly non-numeric, as possible” and focuses on the individuals’ views, attitudes and experiences (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2010, p. 65). Bryman (2012) notes that this form of research strategy involves collecting data in the form of words, as opposed to quantitative research which has its main focus in seeking large numbers (of participants) in order to secure statistical validity.

Qualitative research is concerned with gaining an in-depth understanding of how people perceive the world around them, with an emphasis on the description and meaning of those experiences (Blaxter et al., 2001, 2010; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Smith, 2003). Qualitative methods allow the participants to discuss their views in an in-depth manner, which can help elicit information regarding the nuances and complexities of the topic of research.

3.3 Sampling

Name*	Age	Location	Marital Status	Number of Children	Years as SAHF	Previous Employment	Currently Employed (Y/N)
John	43	North West	Married	1	2.5	Builder	N
Michael	51	North West	Married	6	18	Fisherman	Y
Colin	40	North West	Married	3	1	Ceiling Fitter	N
Greg	44	Greater Dublin	Married	3	7	Builder	N
Frank	43	Greater Dublin	Married	2	3	Painter	N
Declan	37	Greater Dublin	Married	3	2	Sales	Y

Table 1 – Profile of Participants

**Pseudonyms are used throughout the study*

The latest CSO (2012) figures only highlight that there are some 9,600 men “looking after family/home”. As a consequence of the relatively small population to draw a sample from, as well as time and financial constraints, the researcher chose to use a form of non-probability sampling. Blaxter et al. (2010) note that use of either probability or non-probability sampling in research depends much upon the area being studied and the resources available to the researcher. Non-probability sampling is most often used when the researcher does not have access to an adequate population frame, and since the data collected by the CSO is collected on the basis of confidentiality, there is no clear, reliable database of stay-at-home fathers in Ireland.

For the purposes of this study, purposive sampling was used in order to generate the sample. Shaughnessy & Zechmeister write that “individuals selected may be either those judged to have certain characteristics or (more commonly) those who are more likely to provide the most useful information for the purpose for which the study is being done” (1994, p. 119).

The following criteria were used to select participants:

- Be a Male Parent living with Partner;
- Be the Primary Carer for Child/Children and;
- Have spent at least six months as a stay-at-home father;

The men were sourced through contacts that were already known to the researcher. These contacts made the initial contact with the participants on the researcher's behalf in order to source whether there was a willingness to participate. The researcher then obtained the participants contact details. From that point the researcher made contact, via phone, with the participants and arranged dates, times and locations for interviews to take place.

The participants came from two geographical areas within the Republic of Ireland namely The Greater Dublin area and the North-West of the country, with an even split for each area. All of the participants were married and had at least one child over the age of one year old. The average number of years worked by each participant prior to becoming a stay-at-home father was nineteen years, with the average number of years as a stay-at-home father being at five-an-a-half years. (See Table 1 for further details on each of the participants)

3.4 Data Collection

Wisker (2008) notes that using interviews can give the researcher the chance to collect detailed information along with fascinating contextual or other information. The interview involves questioning and discussing issues and can be a useful technique for collecting data that would not be readily available when using other techniques such as questionnaires or observation. Interviews are a more flexible data collection method and will help gain more insightful data than a quantitative method (Blaxter et al., 2010).

The interview type used was the semi-structured interview. This was deemed appropriate due to the fact that it allows for the interviewees to elaborate on their answers, whilst at the same time, the researcher is able to hold some control on the flow of the interview. The researcher must hold a "balanced rapport" with the participant at all times and must be in a position where they can account for, and make the necessary adjustments, for unexpected developments throughout the interview.

Interviews were carried out with the men at suitably private locations where confidentiality could be maintained throughout the process. Three of the interviews took place in the men's family home while three took place in pubs or hotels away from their locality. For the interviews that happened in public, the researcher was cognisant of the need to find suitably private areas within these locations. The interviews took place at varying times during the day and were conducted at times that best suited the participants. Alternative child care arrangements could not be made for two of the men, and as such, their children were present during the entire interview.

The average length of interviews was approximately thirty-nine minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and then backed up on a computer hard drive and an external hard drive. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Prior to commencing the interviews, the interviewees were given a consent form which included detailed information regarding the study and the contact details of the researcher and the supervisor. The questions asked during the interviews focused on how the men perceived and understood their role and, how they coped with and managed their role as stay-at-home fathers. Follow-up questions were asked of the interviewees where necessary in order to clarify information or gain further useful insights.

Prior to beginning the recording of each semi-structured interview, a short questionnaire was conducted which elicited basic information about the interviewee's marital status, number of children, number of years being a stay-at-home father, and other such information in order that the researcher could be more directed in their approach during the actual interviews. This data is presented in Table 1.

3.5 Data Analysis

Following the data collection and transcription, the researcher listened to, and read, the interviews a number of times in order to become familiar with the data. This was done as close as possible to when the interviews took place. This allowed the researcher to note on the copied transcript where participants had done something which was not picked up on the

digital recording such as gestures or facial expressions. Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data collected in the interviews. In analysing the responses from the interviewees, the researcher initially broke down the data by listening and examining it in detail. The researcher was then further able to identify codes and relationships between codes. This eventually resulted in concepts and themes which emerged from the data (Bryman, 2012).

3.6 Ethical Issues

Blaxter et al. suggest that “ensuring that your research is ethically appropriate is a significant aspect of the conduct of sound research” (2010, p. 161). Confidentiality is of utmost importance when carrying out research, and in this regard, data were stored on password protected hard-drives.

All of the male participants were fully briefed on the study over the phone prior to meeting for the interview, including being informed that the researcher had an obligation to report issues in relation to child protection. In this way, participants were empowered to disclose a level of information that they were most comfortable with. Written consent was obtained from the interviewees prior to recording the interviews and each interviewee was told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time up to the date of the final submission. A follow-up e-mail was sent to all the participants before the final submission of the Dissertation in order to give them the opportunity to withdraw from the study. Each interviewee was also informed that the information gathered in the course of conducting the research would only be used for this study. All interviewees were clearly informed. Prior to commencing the interviews, that all names would be changed and references to locations would be removed from the transcripts, and submitted Dissertation. This was done in order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

Ethical issues played a substantial part in this study as the researcher was conscious, in phrasing questions, not to offend or upset the interviewee. If the interviewee felt uncomfortable speaking on a particular topic, the researcher was aware of the need to move

on. It is also important that interviewees are given as much information as needed in order for them to make an informed decision on whether to participate. They were clearly informed that their participation was voluntary.

3.7 Limitations

Sarantakos (1998) notes there are a number of weaknesses in conducting qualitative research. The researcher, as a male interviewing other males about an issue specific for that gender, was very conscious of the potential for interview bias. Denscombe (2003) indicates that the researcher must take steps in order to, in some way, negate this bias. This includes the researcher's presentation, the expectations of data obtained, and the manner in which probing takes place during the interview. Likewise Bryman (2012) notes that in social research complete objectivity is impossible:

“the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith...it should be apparent that he or she has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and the findings deriving from it.” (p. 392-393)

The small-scale nature of this study precludes the researcher from making generalisations about the majority of stay-at-home fathers in Ireland today. Bryman (2012) writes that the vast majority of qualitative research findings are applicable to the sample being studied and that it is almost impossible to make generalisations of entire populations. While this is an unfortunate consequence of the chosen method and sample size, the researcher is confident that the information generated in the process provides a solid basis from which future research in the area may emerge.

3.8 Conclusion

This study was based on a qualitative paradigm which utilised semi-structured interviews for the collection. Appropriate participants were sourced through purposive sampling via a family member and college classmates. This was suited to the in-depth nature of this study.

A demographic of the participants was presented earlier in this Chapter outlining basic information from the participants (See Table 1). Great consideration was given to the ethics throughout this study. Analysis was conducted through the use of Thematic Analysis following the transcription of all interviews. While there are limitations to this study, the researcher is confident that all available resources were used to their maximum potential and that this study provides a basis on which future research in the area may emerge.

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION ONE

4.1 Introduction

The following two chapters outline and present the six main themes that emerged from the data analysis. Themes are explored within the context of existing literature on masculinity, men as fathers, and stay-at-home fathers. Key themes discussed in this chapter include: the role of a stay-at-home father and the emotional impact of being a stay-at-home father. While, in Chapter Five, the desire to return to paid employment, and the supports for stay-at-home fathers are investigated. Sub-sections within the themes shall also be explored where appropriate.

4.2 The Role of a stay-at-home father

A significant theme to emerge from the data was how stay-at-home fathers perceive their role. All participants conveyed similar perspectives on their role as stay-at-home fathers. They described their role as ranging from cooker and cleaner to teacher and provider. All participants, directly and indirectly, made reference to the fact that their primary role was to rear their child/ren.

“First of all it’s looking after the kids, making sure they’re ok and, making sure the house is ok...” (Colin, 40, three children)

“[The role] is basically to try to help [his wife] in the rearing of me children... to the best of my ability and to give them as much love as I can” (Michael, 51, six children)

“... primarily it’s the children... to look after the children... after that... I do a lot of the household chores.” (Greg, 44 years, three children)

The above experiences of the participants’ appear to tally with that of existing research carried out by Chesley (2011), whereby she found that men who become stay-at-home fathers

reassess and renegotiate their role within the household. Men also begin to re-evaluate the importance of general household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and washing, while maintaining some sort of a foothold in the traditionally masculine realm of ‘auto work’ and ‘yard work’ (Kroska, 2003). Among participants of the study, John is in the process of building an Art studio in his garden, and Michael who commented that he has time during the summer months to tidy the garden.

Two of the participants, John and Frank, made specific reference to their role in a gendered fashion noting that they have become the ‘mother’ in the household, with John stating that his current role is “... the actual role of the mother... the traditional mother.” Both appear to hold strong gender stereotypes of what a mother *should* do. Their belief that they are carrying out the ‘mothering’ is supported by Dienhart (1998) and Schindler (2010) who posit that there has been an ingrained assumption on the part of society that parenting is essentially ‘mothering’, no matter who is carrying it out. It is also possible that their viewpoints merely concur with those posited by Schindler (2010), who pointed out that traditional views on roles have caused some conflict for fathers in relation to how they negotiate their role as a provider, and as a parent.

This blurring of the gender boundaries described during the narratives, appears to be somewhat similar to what Walters (2011) noted about the transition of gender roles, with men moving from being cavemen towards being more involved with their families. All the other participants have begun to challenge this link between work and masculinity by engaging in a sphere of society which has been traditionally the domain of women (Morgan, 1992, as cited in Brandth & Kvande, 1998).

In order to further clarify and understand the perspective on their role as stay-at-home fathers, participants were asked if they felt their role was the same as that of their wives. The majority, four, fathers felt that there were differences as a result of them now being the primary carer of their children. They attributed these differences to the fact that their wives were away from home working long hours, or studying full-time. As a consequence, there had been some re-negotiation of roles within their respective relationships. Some of the

fathers in this study felt that the new roles taken on by both parents could be accounted for by their differing personalities, and others put it down to the fact that the mothers are spending less time with their children than before.

“They are totally separate at this stage. I would probably be the primary disciplinarian for the children. I kinda set the goals for what they are gonna do during the week and where they are gonna go... when she comes home and likes to spend time with them, she doesn't really get into the fact of having to [discipline them] cos she doesn't spend much time with them. So she leaves that role to me.” (Greg, aged 44, three children)

“I don't think I could do it in the same manner as my wife could... I think mothers have that different relationship with their [children].” (Declan, aged 37, three children)

Two of the fathers, Michael and John, saw similarities between their role, and that of their wives with respect to caring for their children, with both couples engaging in somewhat more of a co-parenting style. John spoke of his experience summarising that, although his wife is working, she picks up the “slack” as much as he does. While also having a similar viewpoint, Michael saw that there were slight differences between him and his wife when it came to rearing their children. He attributed this to the different qualities that a father and mother bring to a family unit, stating his belief as “you can't replace a mother in the home.”

The above narratives highlight major differences in how the participants perceive their role in relation to that of their wives' and also, how they have transitioned from being 'traditional' breadwinners for their families, to being the full-time carers for their children. The views and experiences of the fathers are somewhat different to those found in studies carried out by Pailhé and Solaz (2008) and Coultrane (1996), where they discovered that there was no significant increase in the time fathers spent on 'parenting time' as compared to when both parents were working. However, the findings of this study would appear to be in line with some previous research which found that, in general, there has been a shift in gender roles within households and these gender roles are continually evolving (Lorber, 2010; Coultrane, 1997).

4.2.1 Role reversal

A significant sub-theme to emerge from the data was the fact that many of the fathers interviewed felt that the role they were now carrying out was in complete contrast to the role they had carried out prior to becoming a stay-at-home father. All of the participants had a career, outside the home previous to becoming a stay-at-home father. These careers tended to be in male dominated profession.

“I’m a full-time carer. It’s also what I would describe as ‘role reversal’ from what I would be used to.” (John, 43, one child)

“I’ve now become more of a house-wife/house-husband and my wife is now the breadwinner/earner.” (Frank, 43, two children)

Like John and Colin, all of the fathers commented on how significant the change in their role has been now that they are stay-at-home fathers, and the steep learning curve arising out of this change in their circumstances. All recognised that they used to work full-time, long hours, and only saw their child/ren very early in the morning and for a few short hours in the evening before the child/ren went off to bed. The fact that they were now at home for the majority of the time with the child/ren was acknowledged by them as having been an enormous change in their lives, their parenting, and their households.

A further significant trend in terms of role reversal was in the area of domestic labour, an area traditionally seen as the domain of the woman/mother in the family. In addition to spending more time with their children, most of the participants spoke about undertaking responsibility for the majority of the household chores/task in their capacity as stay-at-home fathers. This was seen as a significant reversal of the previous norm in their lives when responsibility for household chores/tasks was not considered part of their role as working fathers.

“It’s a big change for me in general... cos I’d always be used to being out working and leaving early in the morning and coming back and playing with the kids when I come back...” (Colin, 40, three children)

“Well, when I was working I got up, I went to work, I came home... house was clean, [and] dinner was waiting on me. Now... I will keep the house clean all day and all night.” (Frank, 43, two children)

While it bears further research, the finding from this study, that stay-at-home fathers are willing to undertake responsibility for the larger percentage of housework, contrasts with Thébaud’s (2010) study, which compared the involvement of fathers in household tasks across nineteen countries from throughout the world. The study discovered that, while there was some increase in fathers’ uptake of household chores/tasks if they earned and/or worked less than their female partners, this increase was not large enough to overturn the traditional gender-based division of housework (ibid).

4.3 Emotional impact of being a stay-at-home father

Only one of the participants in this study entered the role willingly, while out of the remainder, four were made redundant, and one left his job for health reasons. The experiences of these fathers is somewhat similar to that of those studies by Chesley (2011) who found that many of the couples interviewed did not enter into these particular circumstances willingly, and that the primary reason for the majority of the men becoming stay-at-home fathers was due to the ‘shock’ of losing their jobs (ibid). While the men spoke of their shock and naivety towards what the role entailed, the narratives of this study clearly highlight that the men have now become less self-centred, more giving, more responsible, and have also gained some level of maturity in relation to parenthood (Settersten and Cancel-Tirado, 2010).

Fear and anxiety were the commonly expressed emotions by the majority of the participants in this study. Many expressed their shock at their change in circumstances and at having to make major life adjustments when they took on the role. They also mentioned how scary the situation they found themselves in was for them attributing this to the fact that the majority had not chosen to take on this role within their family. Colin appeared to be struggling with regard to the emotional adjustment needed in being a stay-at-home father, having decided to

become a stay-at-home father because there was little employment in the building industry for him. He made reference to “the ‘cabin-fever’ thing” that he feels being at home all the time, and that if he were to continue this role in the long-term, it would have a negative impact on his emotional state:

“It would do my head in.” (Colin, aged 40, three children)

The fathers expressed that they felt a degree of helplessness when they began in the role and found this extremely difficult emotionally. They also commented that they had underestimated the demands that children place on you throughout the day. All of the fathers made reference to that fact that the situations they found themselves in were an alien to them, situations which they had not anticipated themselves being in when they first had children.

“...I’ve never done it, d’you know what I mean? I know people look at it from a distance and think ‘Oh well, food goes in one end and comes out the other’, but there is a hell of a lot more to it.” (John, aged 43, one child)

“It was like reversing the polarity of the Earth. Just a complete change of mentality altogether...” (Michael, aged 51, six children)

“...it was the fact of dealing with children and how...their biggest demand was time, the time they demand of you...I didn’t realise it was gonna be like that...I thought you could just tell them what to do and whatever else and it’d be done...” (Greg, aged 44, three children)

The fact that the men found it difficult to adjust to their new role is not surprising in light of research which highlights that, many men carry out only minimal household tasks in the home (Thébaud, 2011; Coultrane, 1996). There is however, scant literature available on the emotional impact of being a stay-at-home father.

It is also striking that some of the men made comparisons between their old work-life and their new domestic-life. This is not a surprising given that men are still expected by modern

society to act as the primary provider for their families, and are expected to construct their self-identities as masculine subjects through their work life (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Marsh and Musson (2008) note that, as fathers enter the domestic realm, they not only enter a gendered space, but also “an emotional context which has previously been held to be largely for women only” (p. 35).

4.3.1 Social Isolation

All except one of the participants (Michael) found that they had become somewhat socially isolated as a direct result of becoming a stay-at-home father. This may be explained by his working in paid employment in a local shop and the social interaction this brings with it. Two of the participants voiced their dissatisfaction at the lack of adult contact they have on a day-to-day basis which they attributed to being stay-at-home fathers. There were differing views from the fathers on how to alleviate the emotional impact of this isolation and boredom, with two of the fathers using sport as a coping strategy. Declan was involved with his local soccer club prior to becoming a stay-at-home father and has continued this participation

“...you’d have a difficult day nearly every two days... I’d go around to the local GAA club and watch a match... there would be no children with me.”
(Greg, aged 44, three children)

“I think the boredom stemmed from...not having adult interaction, not as much adult interaction as you could. I did spend a lot of the time in my own house with the kids and not in my parent’s house...and not going to friend’s houses.” (Declan, aged 37, three children)

“... [the soccer] was great to be able to organise something outside of the home and to... generally the physical thing as well.” (Declan, aged 37, three children)

Responses from Greg and Declan give us an insight into how they are displaying their masculinity in different arenas. As fathers, they are there for their children all of the time and are understanding and loving, but for those few hours during the week when at the local

sports pitch, they are displaying a different form of masculinity where they are not bound by what their children want or need. They are in effect portraying their male gender in different ways depending on the setting (Johnston & Morrison, 2007)

4.3.2 *Relationship with their children*

Despite the initial negative emotions described by the participants, the strength with which the fathers spoke of being present and involved in their children's lives cannot be understated. All of the fathers commented on the beneficial impact that being a stay-at-home father has had on their relationships with their children. The men were able to see that their relationships with their children have grown as a direct result of them being the primary caregiver for their children. There was much appreciation of the advantageous position that they found themselves in; the fact that their relationships with their children had been greatly enhanced by their time spent together and they are now benefiting greatly from the 'bond' they have formed together as a result of the fathers becoming more *involved* in the caregiving. The fathers also spoke of the importance of them now being "hands-on" in the caring of their children and concluded that this, along with the 'bond' may not have been as present had they been in full-time employment outside the home.

“... that we all grow together as a family and... that I'm there for them... there's joy just watching them grow up and that, you know”. (Michael, aged 51, six children)

“...The other thing is [if working full-time] I wouldn't have had hands-on with my son. That is invaluable, and I wouldn't have understood that if I was working all the time...” (John, aged 43, one child)

It appears from the narratives that while the economic recession affecting Ireland has had an impact on these fathers financially, it has had a profoundly positive impact on the relationship between both father and child. The fathers spoke of their happiness at being there for their children and providing some form of stability, that they are now in a position to be able to teach their children, and also that they are able to give time to their children that they had not been able to do when working:

“And in a way... the downturn in the Irish economy has given me this opportunity to interact [with my son]... it’s a really beautiful thing to have... wow...that’s brilliant...” (John, aged 42, one child)

“So that was our time no matter what happened during the week he got them two to three days with me.” (Greg, aged 44, three children)

“Relationship-wise, in fairness [being a stay-at-home father] has probably got us even closer... I mean there’s no doubt there’s a benefit to it cos you spend...men will spend more time with their kids than they would’ve done and I think that’s very important.” (Frank, aged 43, two children)

Through the narratives, it was clear that the fathers and their children have benefitted greatly from the ‘bond’ they have struck up together as a result of the fathers being more *involved* in the caregiving. They were able to see that their relationships with their children had grown as a direct result of them being the primary caregiver, and they also acknowledged that they would not have been in such an advantageous position had they not become stay-at-home fathers.

The narratives in this study also highlight, and support, the findings of Björnberg & Kollind (2005, as cited in Miller, 2011), who found that men gain greater satisfaction from their involvement in family life, despite the difficulties and stresses experienced in doing so.

CHAPTER FIVE – FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION TWO

5.1 Desire to return to paid employment

While existing international research demonstrates that stay-at-home fathers often become involved in unpaid work in the community as a method of dealing with the “public scrutiny of their non-traditional role” (Doucet & Merla, 2007, p. 463), this particular study did not find this to be the case for the majority of the participants. Only two of the participants (Greg and Declan) expressed that they are involved voluntarily in local sports clubs, as discussed in the previous chapter. For Declan this involvement had started prior to him becoming a stay-at-home father, whereas Greg only became involved in with the GAA once his son began to play sports with the club.

The desire to return to paid employment was one of the strongest emergent themes arising from the data collected. All participants stated their desire to return to some form of paid employment. At the time of carrying out the interviews, both Michael and Declan were in some form of regular paid employment. The remainder of the participants spoke to differing degrees about their wish to gain employment in the coming years. All of the fathers felt that it was important for them, personally, to be working in some capacity with Frank speaking most strongly on his desire to return to work:

“That’s not easy as a man either. It’s not easy not working as a man, I wouldn’t say there’s many men who actually enjoy not working and being at home. They might not mind what they have to do around the house but I’m sure they’d rather be out working.” (Frank, aged 43, two children)

“I’d always hope to go back... Purely to get out of the house and to get a different perspective on life... That you have something to do...” (Greg, aged 44, three children)

Frank went further to say that he felt that when he lost his job he lost all his rights, and that “from a male point of view when you are working it’s ‘the man thing to do’”. The link between paid employment and being a man is not unexpected given the literature which

highlights the associated link between male identity and paid employment (Doherty et al., 1998; Castelain-Meunier, 2002; Kelley & Kelley, 2007; Chesley, 2011):

While the majority of the participants recognised the financial need for both themselves and their wives to be in paid employment, the participants were more willing to look at alternatives to full-time employment, as described by John and Declan most strongly, in support of Kelley & Kelley (2007). Both participants felt that it was important that there be some element of shared-caring between parents and saw this as the ideal for their families. Despite working part-time at the time of the interview, Declan felt that there were great benefits to having one parent at home, while John spoke of his desire to have some a 'fifty-fifty' arrangement with his wife:

“...when I stayed at home...I think you just see the benefits of how good it is to have somebody at home full-time.” (Declan, aged 37, three children)

“The way I look at it is it should be fifty-fifty between you and your wife, to a greater or lesser degree... I could do with a break... to actually be able to go out and earn a few Pound.” (John, aged 43, one child)

A number of the participants commented, to varying degrees, on their difficulties in finding alternative employment as a result of the economic recession. However Frank was strongest in his views that he had little hope of returning to paid employment, despite him completing a college course during his time as a stay-at-home father.

“... I was trying to re-invent myself... I want a career. I keep telling myself that I'm gonna get a job. Keep telling myself that things will pick up. Unfortunately they haven't.” (Frank, aged 43, two children)

Only two of the participants, Michael and Declan, have managed to successfully navigate the tight-rope of both work and home life, with Greg hoping to do similar in the future. They

have found a balance between providing financially for their family (breadwinner), while also being more *involved* in their children's upbringing.

The wish from all the fathers to be involved in paid employment is not surprising given the literature available on the topic. Brandth & Kvande (1998) have suggested that in western societies, such as Ireland, hegemonic masculinity is very closely "... associated with income generating work, and income generating work is considered a central source of masculine identity" (p. 296). Björnberg (2002) notes that the social construction of masculinity and male identity is related to a commitment to work and to provide for one's family through paid work. In order for men to begin to fully renegotiate their masculine identity, like the participants in this particular study, we must loosen the association between masculinity and providing financially for one's family.

The men in this study also struggled with the fact that they were not embodying the societal patriarchal norms which, as Stroud (2009) points out, are seen as moral and healthy for individuals, and include the 'natural' expression of these norms in heterosexuality. These norms are also framed as being moral and healthy for society as a whole. In some way, the fathers in this particular study are resisting what Walters (2011) describes as the movement away from the father embodying the role of a 'caveman' towards being a 'new man'; by them holding close to their hearts the desire to return to some form of paid employment.

The participants clearly felt that in order to provide for their family they must earn financially to do so, with only John commenting that he would like to step away from the monetary system if at all possible:

"By being more self-sufficient... [I am] still providing, but it's actually just making it a little bit cheaper [to live]" (John, aged 43, one child)

In returning to work, these men may experience a form of tension between their yearning to be the *breadwinner*, and their aspiration to be more *involved* in the care of their children

when they *do* return to work. This is similar to Castel-Meunier (2002) who writes that, ‘good fathers’ should actively care for their children alongside being engaged in paid employment, with their role as providers not reducing to compensate for more time spent caregiving. This is despite a move towards seeing the father as not just the *breadwinner* in the family (Hatter, Vinter & Williams, 2002). The varying forms in which these men wish to return to paid employment are somewhat similar to that of many stay-at-home mothers, with both groups finding “creative ways of combining work and caring” (Doucet, 2004, p. 287)

5.2 Supports for stay-at-home fathers

A significant theme emerging from the data was that the participants did not engage in any local supports that would aide them directly in their role as stay at home parents. None of the participants had sought to join any ‘Parent and Toddler’ groups. There appeared to be an acceptance among the study group that they were in a sense alone, and that there would be no benefit for them in joining such groups. Declan was the only participant who said that he would consider going to one of these groups in the future if he were to find himself unemployed again. Frank was less optimistic about seeking out formal supports:

“I’m not involved in any groups at all to be honest. I think, and I think this happens to most men, you do just get into a little rut to a certain extent.”
(Declan, aged 37, three children)

This ‘acceptance’ of their situation and their not seeking out supports from the formal sector of society and the institutions of the State is hardly surprising. There are no clear official statistics available in Ireland on the numbers of stay-at-home fathers and there is also an absence of any noticeable social support to aide “with the social and normative legitimating of their situation” (Doucet & Merla, 2007, p. 469). Doucet & Merla (2007) note that this feeling of social isolation is reinforced by the fathers difficulties to engage with, and integrate into, mothering networks.

The majority of the participants highlighted the importance their extended families played in their lives during their time as the primary carers for their child/ren. It appears from the

narratives that this was the main form of support for the men. The support mainly took the form of the men being able to leave their child/ren with family members for a number of hours during the week:

“I would say the extended family was [supportive]...especially with the hard times and stuff...if I wanted a break [my sister] would offer to take the kids for a while...” (Colin, aged 40, three children)

“They [my parents] would’ve been a great help to me...an hour or two here and there they did spend time with my kids so I could get away...they were very good throughout the whole process.” (Declan, aged 43, one child)

Not all participants felt that they could rely on their extended family with John, for example, feeling that he would be a burden on his family if he were to seek out support. He said that this was exacerbated by him emigrating from Ireland to seek employment for some twenty years only returning in the last five years:

“I’m...probably unlucky there because...I’ve been away...” (John, aged 43, one child)

“Well, my mother is quite elderly...she’s already reared her family, so has my sister. (*Slight resignation in tone of voice*) They just do not have the time. They’ve got their own lives and things to get on with, you know” (John, aged 43, one child)

From this study, it is clear that stay-at-home fathers value, and use, the supports given to them by their families and friends. This is a very similar finding to that of Sheppard (2008) who found that mothers were more likely to engage with informal supports such as family and friends, and were much more reluctant to engage with formal supports. It is also clear, from both Sheppard’s (ibid) study and this research, that both sets of parent see these informal social supports as an important factor in their coping strategies.

5.2.1 *How society views stay-at-home fathers*

There was no consensus among the study group as to how they feel their communities and society, in general, views them in their role as the primary carer of their children. The perceptions ranged from their community being very supportive of them, to it being very “entrenched... tradition” (John).

“As much as we’d like to think that we are a bit more modern in society and a little bit more modern in our views – we’re not. We are still a bit old-fashioned... we still have these misconceived ideas that man goes out to work or whatever else. It’s assumed that the woman will look after the children no matter what the husband is doing.” (Greg, aged 44, three children)

“... will always perceive you differently. I mean, there might be someone who doesn’t have a clear aspect of what you are doing and they will see you differently.” (Declan, aged 37, three children)

For two of the participants, there was a belief that the economic recession was beginning to help alter society’s perception of stay-at-home fathers. The resultant increase in male unemployment and it becoming more a visible trend in society may have the effect of opening peoples’ minds to more non-normative family forms, according to Declan and Frank:

“I think in general society is opening up a bit more and I think their minds are opening to things like that.” (Declan, aged 37, three children)

“I think Ireland, in the last three years, has changed its attitude towards the male and female roles... People don’t have a choice [but to change their attitudes].” (Frank, aged 43, two children)

Some of the fathers spoke of receiving some negative comments from their male friends and family members. These comments were directed towards their role as the primary carers of their child/ren. The men coped with such remarks in a variety of ways ranging from humour, dismissing the comments, challenging the individuals making the comments, or internalising them.

“But I would challenge any man that has children to send their wife off for three weeks and look after their children on their own and cope.” (Greg, aged 44, three children)

While it is difficult to make generalisations in relation to how society views stay-at-home fathers, the findings highlight the societal and cultural expectations are beginning to change. However the participants still believed that society still sees masculinity and fatherhood being linked with *providing* (Latshaw, 2011) and which link femininity and motherhood being linked with *caregiving*. Through the narratives, it is clear to see that the fathers have no difficulty in explaining to their friends and family their current situations and as such, are beginning to break down the barriers which exist to men becoming more involved in the care of their children. The ‘traditional’ gender norms are beginning to be challenged by these fathers, who all speak openly of their situation (when confronted to do so), thus society is seeing more of the “nurturant father” as described by Anderson (2005).

5.3 Summary

The above chapters have outlined the main findings from the data collected and have highlighted the different themes which emerged. They have also discussed the themes in relation to the literature presented in the Chapter Two. Having presented and discussed the findings, it was not possible to make a clear distinction between the experiences of the men from the North-West of Ireland and those from the Greater-Dublin area. A more in-depth, broader study may elicit differences between experiences of stay-at-home fathers from rural and urban areas.

The fathers spoke very openly and honestly about how the majority of them had not entered into this situation willingly and that they had struggled to varying degrees with the accompanying role-reversal which they experienced.

It is clear however, that despite the negative emotional impact this change in circumstances had on the fathers, they all commented on the degree to which the 'bond' with their children has grown over the time they have been stay-at-home fathers. Contrary to Castelain-Meunier (2002) observation, this study has discovered another side to fatherhood, one that not only espouses the emotional and practical difficulties associated, but also highlights the great 'joy' that the fathers found in their new, (and for most) unexpected, role; a joy they acknowledge they might never have experienced had they not become stay-at-home fathers.

It is very evident from the narratives that all of the fathers hold strongly the view that they should be in some form of paid employment outside of the home. The reasons for this ranged from the family needing the financial input of both parents, to the men seeing it as their role to provide financially for their families.

It is also apparent that these fathers utilised informal supports to help them manage in their role, as opposed to engaging in more formal supports such as 'Parent and Toddler' groups. However, not all of the fathers were able to avail of such supports from family members with some feeling that, when it came to child care, they were alone and could not call upon anyone. This was very evident when two of the fathers could not find alternative child care arrangements when carrying out the interviews.

Social isolation was also a key issue that fathers discussed throughout their narratives. The lack of adult contact was seen as one of the biggest challenges for the fathers now that they are stay-at-home fathers and they had not anticipated this to be an issue prior to them taking up this role in their families.

CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This qualitative study of stay-at-home fathers sought to generate an increased understanding of how these subjects view their role within their family. It also set out to gain an insight into the emotional impact of being a stay-at-home father. Finally, it hoped to investigate the different types of supports fathers in this particular situation use as coping strategies.

The available literature highlights that there is a dearth of knowledge related to the experiences of men who have found themselves in the position of being the primary caregiver to their children. Furthermore, from an Irish perspective, it is clear that there is little or no research on the area of stay-at-home fathers which could be drawn from comparatively with this study. As a consequence of this, there was scant literature available. I believed it was relevant to the aims of the study that the voices of men who inhabit this domain be heard, and this was a salient factor in my choosing the particular methodological approach of this study. It is also felt that this study begins to shed light on a heretofore modestly researched area in modern Irish society.

The available literature also highlighted the link between masculine identity and the world of paid employment outside the home. The traditional notion of what it means to be a man still prevails in society today, although this is slowly changing. This was confirmed in this study with all of the participants speaking of their hope that they return to paid employment in the near future. Many of the men felt they needed to return to work for their own sanity and also because they saw it as the ‘masculine’ thing to do. They also felt that they would like to be able to return to working more flexible hours in order to maintain a foothold in both domains of employment and domestic life.

This study found that many of the fathers felt they had underestimated what the role of a stay-at-home parent entails and were rather naïve as to what to expect when taking on the role. It

also found that the men appeared to equate their role to traditional feminine household tasks such as washing and cleaning, with two men making a direct reference to their role being related to that of the ‘mother’.

Despite the negative emotions described by the fathers, the strength with which they spoke of being present and involved in their children’s lives cannot be dismissed. They commented on the beneficial impact their new role has had on their relationships with their children, with them having seen their relationships with their children strengthen as a direct result of them being at home. There was much appreciation of the advantageous position that they found themselves in; they have benefited greatly emotionally from the ‘bond’ they have formed together as a result of the fathers becoming more *involved* in caregiving.

The study also found that there is a sense of social isolation among the participants with many only having the support of family and very close friends when it comes to aiding them in their role. The men appeared to have misjudged the extent to which they would become socially isolated as stay-at-home fathers, and felt they had missed out on a lot of adult contact and conversations during this time. Two of the fathers actively tried to alleviate this by establishing or maintaining links with sporting clubs in the locality.

From an Irish perspective, the father being the primary carer for his children has been seen as a non-normative, or non-traditional, form of family configuration. Despite the increase in male unemployment, and the resultant increase in stay-at-home fathers, this non-normative family form may, in time, become more normative. However, there still remains a large obstacle to this change in societal views – namely the Irish Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (Government of Ireland, 1937), which explicitly mentions the mother and her role within the family home (Art. 41.2.1). It is difficult to see how the rights and responsibilities of fathers will be furthered through policy without a change in the wording of the Constitution, given that all laws, and as such, policies, must be in line with the spirit of the 1937 Constitution. However, there are certain steps that can be taken in order to build a clearer picture of what it is like to be a stay-at-home father in Ireland today.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings in this study have highlighted how men who are stay-at-home fathers view their role within the family and also within society in general. Hearing the mens' voices will help give policymakers an insight into their perspectives of their experiences both positive and negative.

The relevance of this study to policymakers cannot be underestimated. Without having a clear understanding of how fathers perceive their role in general, and more specifically stay-at-home fathers, specific family-orientated policies may be wide off the mark and as such, not integrate the changing nature of the Irish family. Gatrell (2007) notes that men, who enter into the realm of caregiving, are entering somewhere that has traditionally been the domain of women and in essence this is seen as a non-normative, or non-traditional, realm for fathers to inhabit. This could be said to be the case for many western societies. However, some countries have begun to implement more family-friendly practices that encourage mothers, as well as fathers, to become more involved in the lives of their children.

For example, in many Scandinavian countries fathers are actively encouraged to take their share of parental leave with up to 80 percent of the father's wage being covered by the State (in the case of Sweden). However, it is worthy to note that (as of 2004) only 15 percent of the parental leave was taken by the fathers (The Economist, 2004). It is clear from this present study that fathers would like to have more flexible working arrangements in order to continue to play an active role in the upbringing of their children. It is recommended that family-orientated employment policies be implemented to allow fathers to take more time off to care for their children, while also maintaining a foothold in paid employment. In this way fathers may feel that they are both caring for their children and being *involved* in their care while also *providing* financially for their families.

This study has clearly shown that stay-at-home fathers lack formal supports in their lives which may be in a position to aide them in their role. As such, it is recommended that fathers be actively encouraged to attend 'Parent and Toddler' groups in order to gain from the

support of others who may be in similar circumstances as themselves, but also to alleviate the effects of the social isolation the fathers spoke of. Also, 'Parent and Toddler' groups should be more welcoming of fathers in general and move away from seeing them as places for mothers only (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett & Pruett, 2010). In doing this, fathers may begin to attend such groups and as a result they will begin to break down societal barriers and views that exist about fathering.

It is hoped that this study will raise awareness of the importance for policymakers to engage with this, admittedly small but, growing group in society in order to best support them through the transition from being the breadwinner to being the breadmaker. Stay-at-home fathers must move from being an 'unseen' and 'unheard' sector within Irish society to being seen and heard. It is recommended that stay-at-home fathers be encouraged to maintain social links outside the home in an attempt to negate any negative effects of social isolation. Adult contact was seen as very important to the fathers in this study and as such it is recommended that fathers be encouraged to join groups or clubs, such as the Mens Sheds initiative (Irish Men's Sheds Association), as this may alleviate the sense of isolation experienced.

As this was a small-scale study it is almost impossible to generalise from the findings. In this vein the researcher recommends that a larger-scale study take place in which researchers would be able to draw more concrete conclusions from the data with respect to not only the emotional impact of the being a stay-at-home father, but also on non-normative families living their lives in Ireland today. This would give valuable data to policymakers to best direct interventions and services for fathers who find themselves the primary carers for their children.

Further study with regard to the increase in the numbers of stay-at-home fathers is warranted as it will give policymakers an understanding as to whether there is a correlation between the economic recession and this group in society. This will aid in the drafting of specific policies that will help men transition from the world of work to the domestic sphere.

It is also important that we discover the long-term effects on the father/child relationship within stay-at-home father families. Much of the research to date has focused on the negative impact the absent father has on the relationship between father and child. A longitudinal study would be best to evaluate the strength of the relationship between an involved father and his children to discover whether the outcomes for the children of stay-at-home father families are similar to those of families of different make-up. These may be areas which the 'Growing Up in Ireland' study could research in the coming years.

Overall, from an Irish perspective, there is a scarcity of literature available with regard to stay-at-home fathers. This study has begun to shed light on the area and it is this researchers hope that further study in the area will take place. By doing so, it will begin to break down the societal view that fathering is essentially *providing* financially for his children at the cost of his relationship with his children.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One:

Letter of Introduction to the Participants

[Researchers Address]

[Date]

[Participants Address]

Dear [Name],

I am currently studying for a Masters Degree (MA) in Child, Family and Community Studies in the School of Social Sciences and Law in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). In part completion of this MA it is necessary for me to write a Dissertation. I have chosen to focus on the subject of stay-at-home fathers.

The aim of the study is to gain greater insight into the lives of men who have become the stay-at-home parent in the family, while their partner is the main earner in the household.

I would be most grateful if you would consider taking part in this study. By doing so it is hoped you would agree to take part in a recorded interview lasting approximately forty minutes in length. The questions asked will be based on the role of a stay-at-home father.

The recorded interviews will be transcribed and analysed. I will be the only person to hear the recordings and view the transcripts in full. Once the final Dissertation is published you may view a copy by contacting me on the details below. The original recordings and the transcriptions will be stored on an external Hard Drive. All names and other identifying features of the interview will be removed during the course of the transcription.

If you are willing to take part, or have any further questions, please feel free to contact me on [phone number] or by e-mail on, [e-mail address]. Your co-operation and time is most appreciated. My Dissertation Supervisor is Mairead Seymour, Lecturer in DIT and can be contacted on 01-4024133.

Kind Regards,

Eoin O'Brien

MA Child, Family and Community Studies (DIT).

Appendix Two:

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study by Eoin O'Brien. The study is an investigation into the lives of men who are stay-at-home fathers and who provide the majority of care for their children while their partner/spouse is the main earner. I hope to gain an insight into the lives of such men and develop an understanding of the world in which they live.

The research will involve an interview lasting approximately one hour in length. The questions asked during the interview will involve the investigation of the lives of stay-at-home fathers including child care, domestic labour and work outside of the home.

The final study will be submitted in part completion of the MA in Child, Family and Community Studies. All information obtained during the research will be held in confidence and will be disclosed only with your prior consent. There may be cases in which confidentiality may be breached; where there is a concern for the safety and welfare of the participant or others.

By signing this document you are giving your permission for information gathered in the interview process to be used in the form of direct quotations. Any identifying features such as names and locations mentioned during the course of the interviews will be removed in order to uphold confidentiality.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on [contact details]. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point up to the publication of the final Dissertation.

Having read the information provided, and signed below, you have agreed to take part in this research project.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Three:

Interview Questions

Brief Introductory (Background) Questions:

1. Age: _____
2. Number of Years as 'Stay-at-home father': _____
3. Number of years in paid employment prior to this: _____
4. Occupation/Training: _____ (Currently/Previous)
5. Number of Children: _____
Age(s): _____
6. Marital Status: Co-habiting/Married/Civil Partnership
7. Location: _____

Interview Questions

1. Can you explain to me how you see your role as a 'stay-at-home father'?
Would you see it any differently than that of your partners' role?
2. Can you explain to me any of the benefits to being a 'stay-at-home father' in Ireland today?
What is it about these that you see as being particularly beneficial to you?
3. Can you explain to me any of the challenges to being a 'stay-at-home father'?
Is there anything about your role that you would change and why?
4. How has your day-to-day life changed since you became a 'stay-at-home father'?
5. Are you involved in any groups/clubs that support you in your role as a stay-at-home father?
Outside of groups/clubs would you consider that you have any other support mechanisms (informal friendships with any other stay-at-home parents, or ex-work colleagues, etc)?
6. Do you anticipate that you will return to employment [Part-time, or Full-time depending on the individual participant] in the future?
How do you think this will affect your role within the household and your relationship with your child/ren?
7. How do you think society views you as a 'stay-at-home father'?
How have those in your family, community reacted to your current circumstances?

Appendix Four:

Sample Interview

Interview with [REDACTED] from [REDACTED] on 6th July 2010 afternoon

Eoin: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

John: [REDACTED]

E: Could you explain to me how you see your role as a ‘Stay-at-home father’ (SAHD) today?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

E: When you say the ‘traditional mother role’ what would you see as the traditional mother role today?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

E: (01:26) Right. And would you see that this particular role that you are in now is different from your wife’s current role, parenting role?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

E: (02:42) You spoke there a second ago about the cooking and the cleaning and that you hadn’t cooked [a lot] before now. Could you explain to me some of the challenges that you see to being a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]

E: Or would you see challenges to it [being a SAHD]?

J: I [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E: And would you have seen any other challenges from when you initially took on the role [of SAHD]?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (04:50) And would that have been different from, like it's a year-and-a-half now [that] you've been a SAHD, am I right?

J: [REDACTED]

E: Two-and-a-half years. So it would have been just as your son was born?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (05:24) So, you would see that year, when your wife was off work, as being a great help to you? Now would you see it as a building-block?

J: [REDACTED]

E: And would you have, you mentioned there about talking about your son to people. When you became a full-time SAHD, did you have, or do you have supports that help you in your role as a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E: (07:28) Right.

J: [REDACTED]

E: So you wouldn't have (ex) work colleagues that you would be still in contact with that you would be able to use as a support for you...

J: [REDACTED].

E: (08:06) ...is there anyone in the locality that you can talk to about the experience for yourself?

J: [REDACTED].

E: (8:30) And you family. Would they be a support to you?

J: [REDACTED]

E: You say your brother takes it in his stride. Have you taken the rearing of your child in you stride?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (10:03) We've talked a bit about the difficulties, or the challenges, that you've had. You say you hadn't done much of the cooking before you became a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (10:54) So, it was literally step-by-step. You used the tools around you, like the internet to get yourself going.

J: [REDACTED]

E: Could you explain to me the benefits to being a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

E: (12:15) I was asking you just about the benefits that you see for yourself being a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

E: (12:50) Would you have seen yourself in this particular role maybe ten or fifteen years ago?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

(Slight interruption by son again)

E: (14:17) You're saying that you wouldn't have really seen yourself in that role but you would've accepted it?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

E: (15:14) So, it would seem now that your focus has totally shifted?

J: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E: Would you see yourself, do you anticipate yourself going back to employment?

J: (17:52) [REDACTED]

E: (18:46) But you wouldn't be saying 'No' to returning to work if the work was there?

J: [REDACTED]

E: And it seems, from what you are saying, that it not really by choice that you are not working?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (20:00) Would there be one situation that would be more beneficial for you?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (20:55) Would you have seen Irish society viewing SAHD's in a particular way? Or would it have been particular individuals or sections of society?

J: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E: (21:50) If you could describe it as it is what word or phrase would you use?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (23:18) So you wouldn't feel you could speak freely with your neighbours about how your son is getting on? Would there be an understanding from your neighbours or wider community?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (24:27) And do you think this [attitude] has gone out into the community or society? Do you think that is a reflection of the Irish male?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (26:37) So, would I be right in saying that you are comfortable with the decision you and your wife made for you to be a SAHD? I know you spoke [previously] about seeing that it should be more fifty-fifty scenario.

J: [REDACTED]

E: (27:34) And do you think that some children are missing out? I know it's hard to say...

J: [REDACTED]

E: (28:12) It seems, for you, that the bond with your son... would I be right in saying that this is the most beneficial aspect for you of being a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (29:10) [REDACTED]

J: [REDACTED]

E: (29:45) Is that the major change you've seen since you've become a SAHD that...

J: [REDACTED]

E: (30:29) You mentioned earlier on, when we were talking about returning to employment, and you mentioned about being self-sufficient. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that?

J: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E: (32:04) By doing this, you want in a sense to step outside the monetary system? It's not to become the breadwinner financially. It's an alternative way?

J: [REDACTED]

E: So it's still providing for your family?

J: [REDACTED]

(Interview stopped for a number of minutes while John put his child down for a nap – timestamp re-set to 00:00)

E: [REDACTED]

J: [REDACTED]

E: (01:11) And would you long for that support system?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (01:36) We spoke a bit about the rural, traditional male values in this particular area. Is it something that you find challenging living here and being in that particular environment?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (02:25) So, it hasn't really...

J: [REDACTED]

E: (02:33) Was there any other challenges that you would have, that you have faced, or that you are facing now as a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (3:37) It would appear that this is more how you deal with things in general and not just issues that relate to being a SAHD?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (05:23) And is that something that you notice that's a difference from...

J: [REDACTED]

E: From your life previous, yeah?

J: [REDACTED]

E: (06:48) I think I've gotten all the information I need from you John. I'd like to thank you again for taking part.

J: [REDACTED]