

# The New DaD

Exploring Fatherhood within a Career Context

*Book 405V: School Year at Boston College*

*Book 405V: School Year at Boston College*

*Book 405V: School Year at Northeastern University*

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

# Table Of Contents

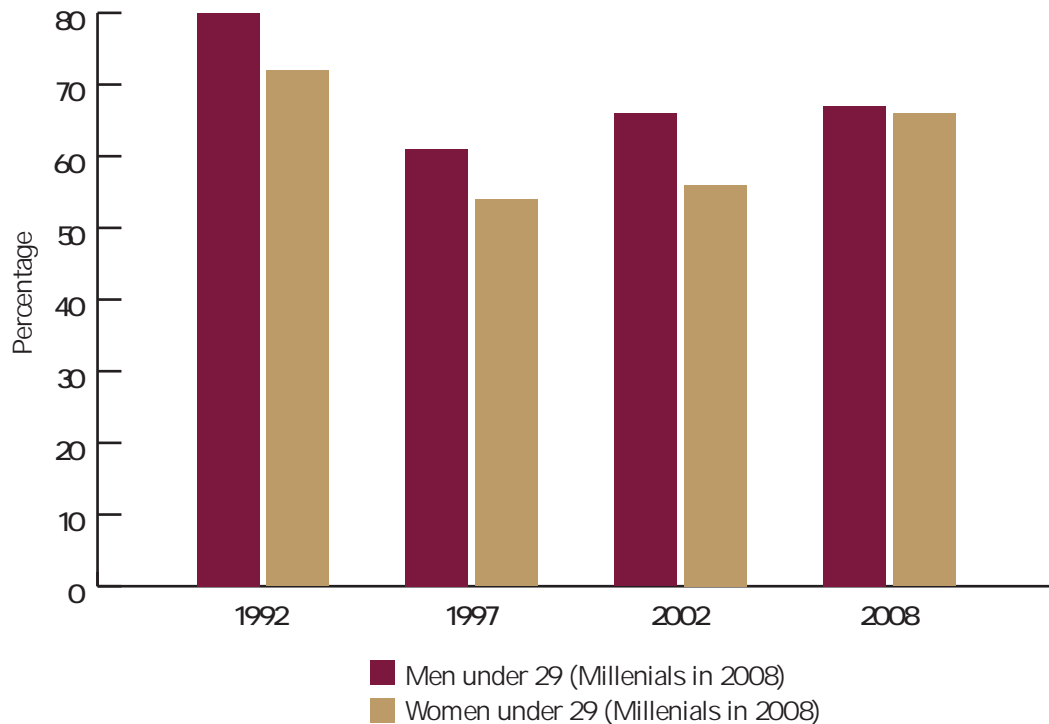
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# Introduction



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



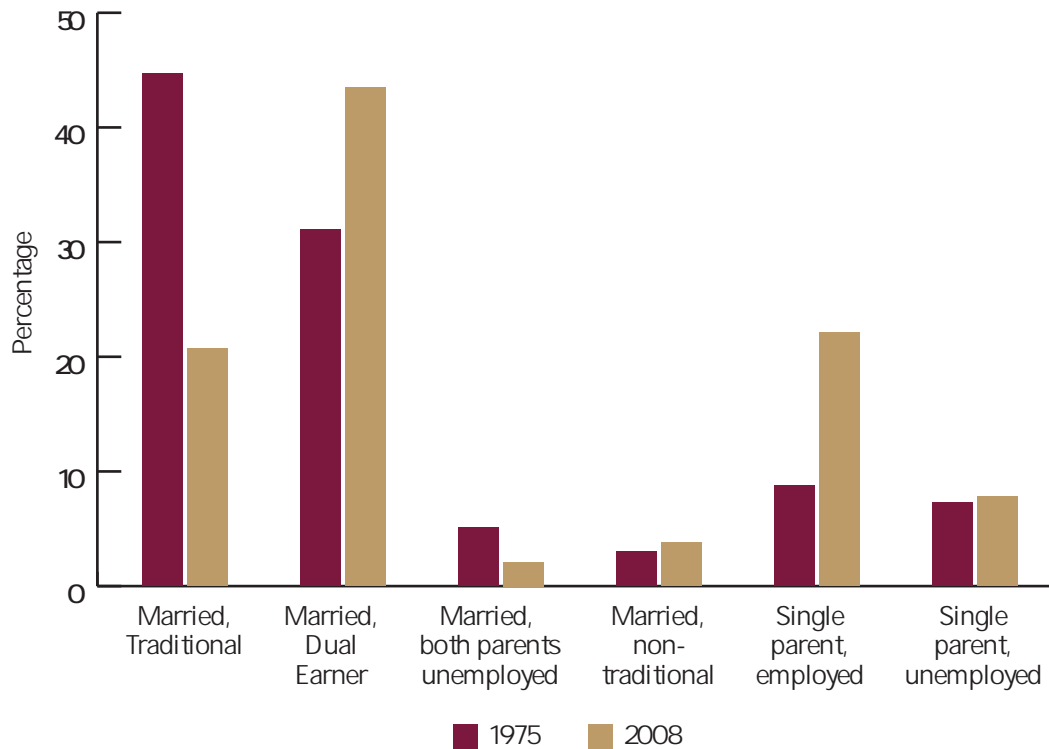
Galinsky, E, Aumann, K, & Bond, J. (2008). The national study of the changing workforce 2008: Times are changing: Gender and generation at work and at home. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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





*Most men no longer assume they can or will want to support a family on their own, but there is no clear path to manhood. Work and family shifts have created an ambiguous mix of new options and new insecurities with growing conflicts between work and parenting. Amid these conflicts and contradictions young women and men must search for new answers and develop innovative responses.”*

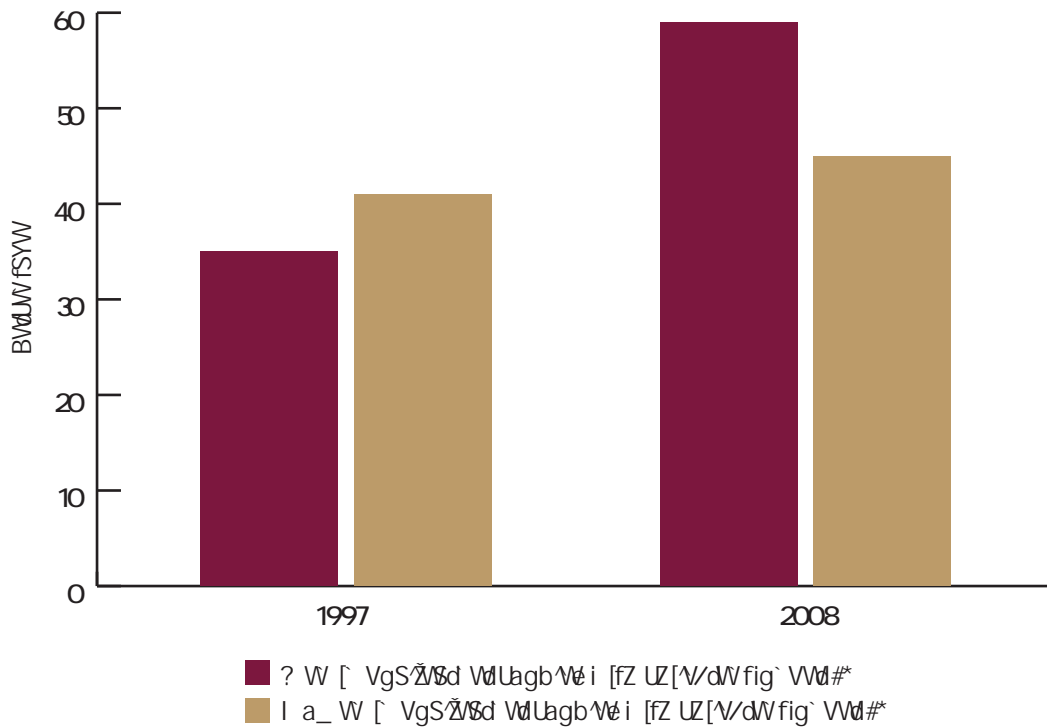
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All of these changes in demographics, values, and career prototypes point toward a changing role for working fathers in our society. In essence, contemporary fatherhood ideals are in many respects similar to what maternal ideals and expectations were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

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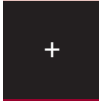
**Table 2 Dual-earner Couple work-Life Conflict for Men and women in 1977 and in 2008**



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

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

*“I was just thinking about work and the role and how I’m viewed by people at work. And I think the one thing that’s been somewhat frustrating to me is appreciation for my contributions in my role [as a father]. Let’s say for example a peer of mine who’s a woman who has a child of a similar age; there’s more empathy, more understanding more wow you’re really doing a lot. ... I think there’s an assumption that when I go home I’m not doing as much. And, I have more time to focus on things like work. And, there’s just a natural inclination to believe that my wife does the bulk hi bulk . And*





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

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

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

Harry Chapin, Singer/Songwriter

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# The Research Results

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

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

## The Personal Impact of fatherhood

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

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

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

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

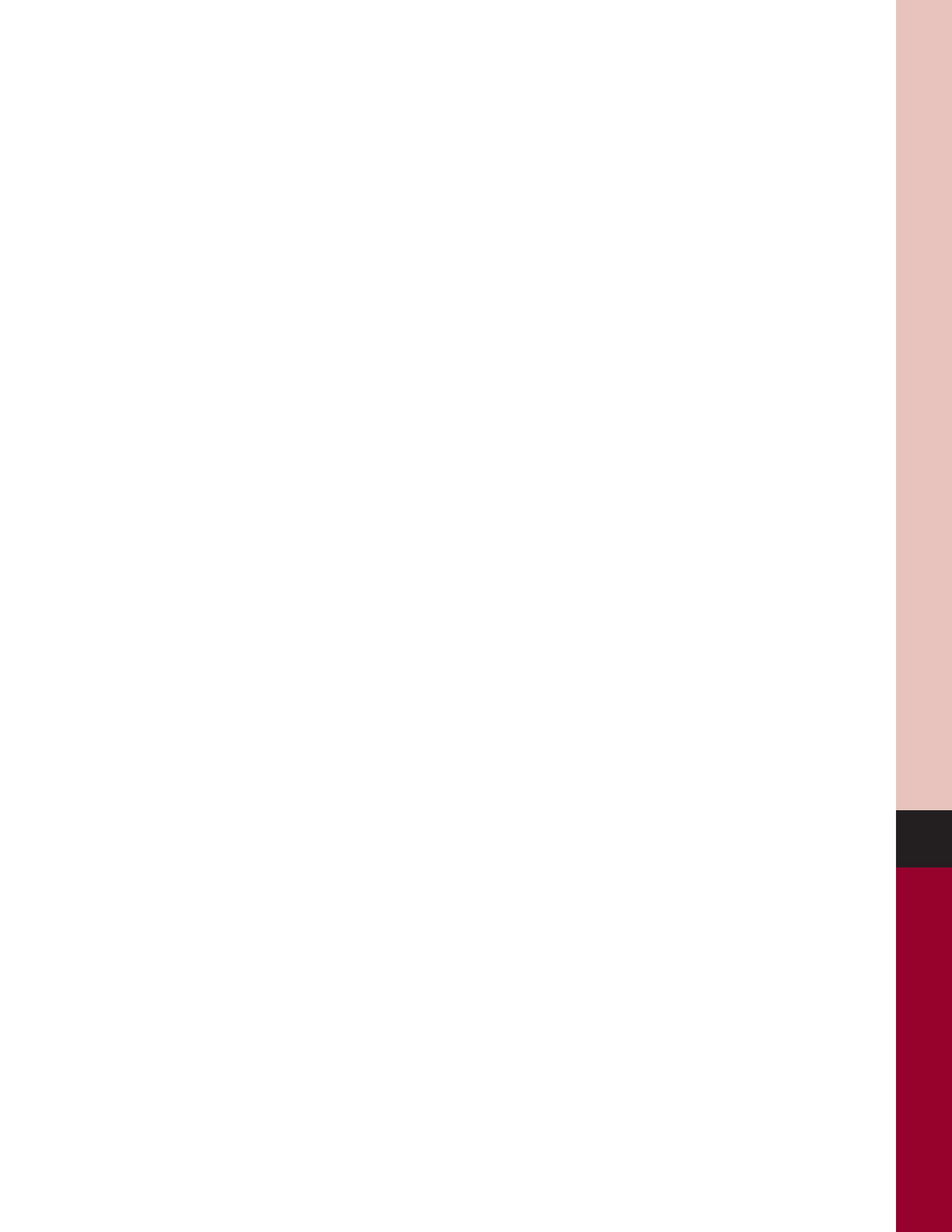
*“Obviously being a good provider is important to me. Knowing [my son] has what he needs, his being safe is important to me. I think just enjoying life is a generic way of saying it. ‘You want to go outside? Let’s go outside. I don’t care if it’s raining or snowing out, let’s go outside. You want to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

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







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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Of course there are many trying aspects of fatherhood as well. We asked our participants what they like least about being a father. Some of the expected subjects came up such as changing diapers,



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*"I play a lot of recreational sports That's - that's very important to me So between*





financial services industry stated:

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

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

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

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

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

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When asked, more than half of our participants stated that their

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

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

*"I think it was very difficult. It was a high-pressure job, a venture backed start up. The CEO, father of 3 spent just about no time with his kids and expected the same of his direct reports. So there was a company corporate mentality of work first" / /*





# Discussion and Implications

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

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



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# Acknowledgements

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

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

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

Our colleagues at the Center, Danielle Hartmann, Catie Maillard, Debbie Santiago, and in particular Jennifer Fraone, have been great advisors, helped with our research, and provided assistance with shaping and editing the report. As always, Dr. Annie Soisson of Tufts University has also been a great sounding board on the project and editor for this report.





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# Appendix A: The Interview Protocol

## Introduction

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

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

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

## Interview Questions

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

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

## Personal History Questions

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

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

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

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

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

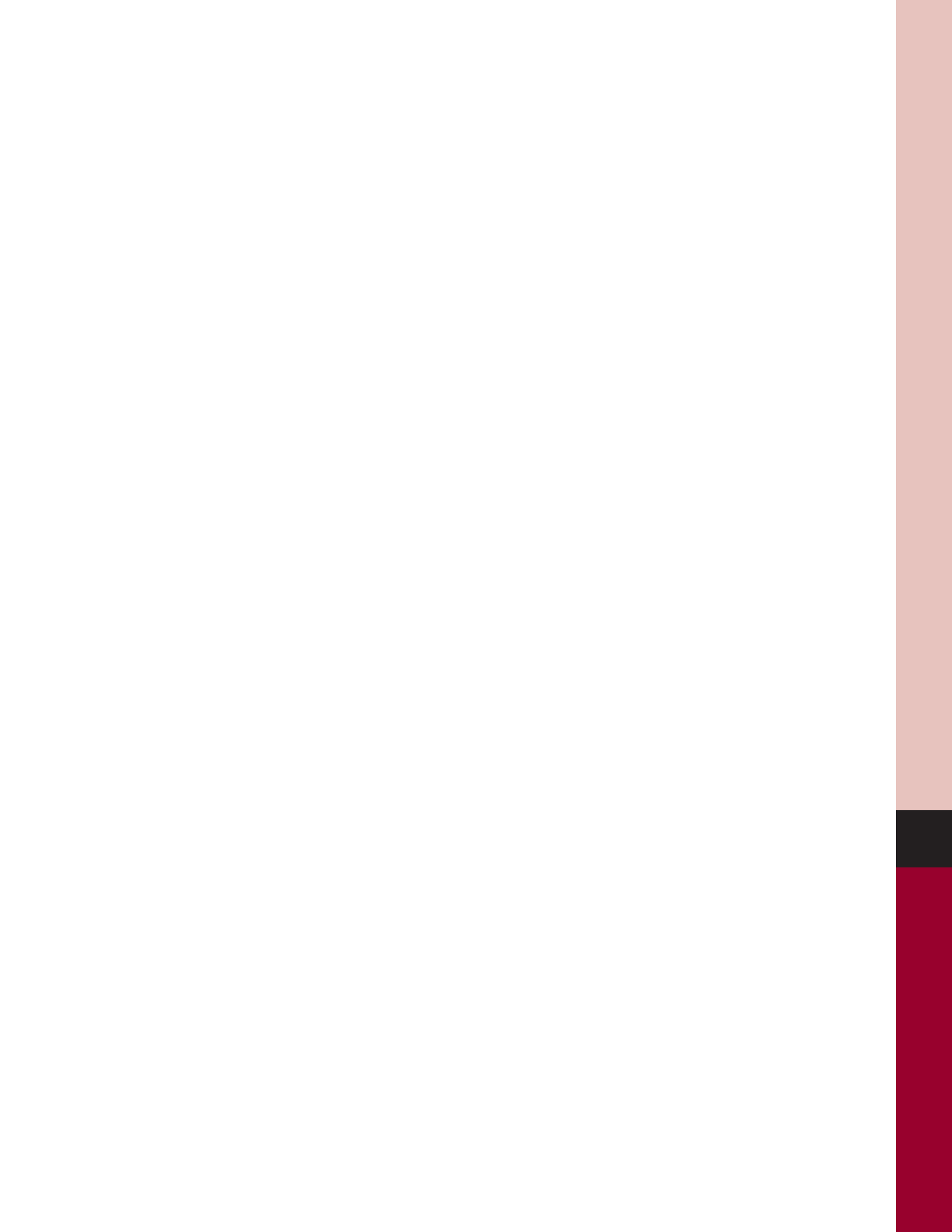
1. Why do you work?
2. Do you consider your work a job, career, calling?
3. What are your career aspirations? 5 Years from now? 10 years from now?
4. How has your family (spouse, parents, in-laws) responded to your career?
5. Did you have a vision of what your life today would look like in terms of your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

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

### Hž CgVd[a` ea` XsfZVdZaaV [ fZW ad]b'SUW

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



# Appendix B

Fatherhood Study Sample Descriptive Data: 33Participants

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