

The Loneliness of Being a Stay-at-Home Dad

12:00 PM / November 3, 2016



Radu Sigheti / Reuters

Several readers have responded to a callout we made in our [Daily newsletter yesterday](#) (as part of our [Working series](#)) asking for perspectives from stay-at-home dads and how their experience is different from being a stay-at-home mom. One of the most prominent themes is the lack of social support—and even stigma—experienced by men. A reader elaborates on that theme below (with tweets added by me), and his name is Chris Bernholdt, who blogs at [DadNCharge](#):

As a board member of the [National At-Home Dad Network](#) and a stay-at-home dad for the past eight years, it was always our family's plan for me to stay home if the opportunity arose. I was a public school teacher who put my career on hold so I could be home with our children. My wife, as the primary breadwinner, embraced her role, as did I, and we

did what was best for our family.

The majority of people see 2008 as a defining year for stay-at-home parents. While many men lost their jobs and fell into the role as the primary caregiver, many of us made the conscious decision to be home with our children instead of having a stranger raise them in daycare. For many of us, this choice has meant everything to our relationships with our children.

Am I still a stay-at-home dad if I'm never home?

<http://buff.ly/28NwiqH> via [@OWTK](#) [#athomedad](#) [#sahd](#)
[#fatherhood](#)

— At-Home Dad Network (@homedadnet) [11:41 AM - 23 Jun 2016](#)

I can't say that it's all good. No job is perfect and it has had its ups and downs. Most notably, being a stay-at-home dad can be isolating. While our numbers have steadily increased over the past 10 years, it has been difficult to find other dads to connect with.

I've encountered people who run the gamut on their feelings about a man staying at home. I have encountered people who haven't taken me seriously, have put me down, or saw me as a threat at the playground because I was a man.

On the other side, I have found moms who are accepting of me because we are all parents in the end. When I lived in Rochester, NY, I had a group of moms that I was very close with and they included me. They saw me as an equal and weren't hung up on labels. That acceptance is everything to us stay-at-home dads.

That's why The National At-Home Dad Network puts on an [annual convention](#), which seeks to create support, education, advocacy, and community for stay-at-home dads who feel like they are alone.

Depending on where we may live geographically or depending on our community's traditional roles, we may not know of any other stay-at-home dads in our area. NAHDN helps dads find each other.

National At Home Dad Network President [@ChrisRoutly](#) opens [#HomeDadCon](#) with a message that we are not alone. This is community. [@homedadnet](#)

— Chris Bernholdt (@DadNCharge) [10:33 PM - 8 Oct 2016](#)

Take the isolation of being at home as the primary caregiver and add to that things like: when classes are called Mommy and Me; when you go to change your baby in the men's restroom and there isn't a changing table in there—only in the women's restroom; someone asks if you are babysitting or if you are giving mom the day off. You can feel like less of a parent when those things stack up.

Last day to snag one of these for your kid! Also comes as baby onesie. [#DadsDontBabysit](#)
[https://teespring.com/stores/dadsdontbabysit ...](https://teespring.com/stores/dadsdontbabysit...)

— At-Home Dad Network (@homedadnet) [1:49 AM - 18 May 2016](#)

All too often, the bar for expectations is set far too low so, when a dad is seen doing things that moms do everyday, we get overly praised for it. We aren't Superdads; we are just fathers doing what is nature and taking care of our children, which is what stay-at-home moms are doing and have been doing for us for a long time.

If anything, staying at home has shown my children that you can be anything you want to be. Traditional roles aren't so traditional anymore. Families are finding ways to balance working and caregiving in new and creative ways. The important thing is to find out what works for your family and embrace that role.

That sort of husband sounds like a better fit for this reader:

I know you want to hear from men—but they won't tell you the truth because they don't understand what parenting and housekeeping are all about.

While I worked three jobs—nurse practitioner at Kaiser, ER nurse (12-hour night shifts on weekends), and managed to teach one day a week at a college, he stayed home. He didn't "want" to work; he'd rather be playing golf, tennis, or scuba diving.

He NEVER cleaned anything. He only shopped if I made the list and wrote out meals for the week. He NEVER did the laundry or changed all the sheets. He figured that staying home was "hard" enough. I cooked evening meals and breakfast and packed lunches. On weekends I worked 6pm-to-6am ER shifts, that way I could care for the kids while he spent the weekend playing golf or tennis. He watched football or other sports during the day and NEVER took the kids out ... and we lived in Hawai'i.

He REFUSED to clean anything. If a child threw up, he left it in the clothes and left the cleanup for me. After all, I was the nurse. If I tried to teach him how to use the washer and dryer, he would screw it up. I spoke with other women who said "They do it wrong so you'll do it."

Men don't have a clue what it means to keep a house or care for kids. My husband called it "babysitting." It's NOT babysitting when it's your own kids!

Here's a stay-at-home dad in Alabama who also resented his spouse:

Being a mommy daddy wasn't a decision I made. It was, like seemingly everything else in my life, thrust upon me. I was a real estate lawyer in 2009 with two kids, ages 15 and 12, when my oldest relapsed with leukemia. Due to market conditions (remember the crash?), my practice had shriveled to practically nothing.

The wife had decided a couple of years earlier to restart her career after having taken a several-years sabbatical with the first episode of leukemia. She had a job, while mine had practically disappeared. She took off the first time, so it was my turn. I shuttered my practice and set about being a homemaker and a bone-marrow-transplant-patient's

caregiver.

Outside of caring for the transplant patient, i.e., during the times I was just a homemaker, I found the whole thing boring and lonely. There's no one to talk to. Guys aren't like women; we don't socialize so much, except when there's a purpose behind it beyond just the socializing, and no guy wants to get together to talk about what works best for cleaning bathroom tile.

I found that housework is incredibly easy. I could clean the whole house in an hour. I could do all the laundry twice a week or so without breaking a sweat (or bitching about it like the wife did when she had to do it). I could cook breakfast and dinner every day without blinking an eye. I could get everyone wherever they needed to be without drama. I began to see why women needed a "little helper" (e.g. Valium) to make the drudgery bearable in the Sixties.

It was boring, but I also did all the home and vehicle maintenance and repairs (the guy stuff I did before becoming the homemaker), including lawn care, exterior and interior painting, improvement projects, washing cars, etc.

The wife, on the other hand, had nothing to do that was more challenging than driving herself to work and home everyday. So, of course, she cheated on me and ultimately left. Which worked out well, freeing me from having to serve a bunch of surly, unappreciative, selfish people. I'm much happier now.