

“Thanks for your interest in our Facebook group, but it's only for dads:” Social Roles of Stay-at-Home Dads

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ABSTRACT

The number of stay-at-home dads (SAHDs) in the U.S. has risen dramatically over the past 30 years. Despite gaining social acceptability, SAHDs still experience isolation and judgment in their offline environments. This research explores how SAHDs use the Internet and social media related to their roles as fathers. We conducted interviews with 18 SAHDs about their families, their identities, and their social experiences. We find that they turn to social media to gain social support and overcome isolation they experience offline. However, they engage in strategic self-disclosure on particular platforms to avoid judgment related to being SAHDs. They rely on online platforms to give off both traditionally feminine and masculine impressions—as loving caregivers of their children while simultaneously as do-it-yourself men who make things around the house. Through creating Facebook groups and using anonymous social media sites, SAHDs create multidimensional social networks that allow them to cope better with the role change. We reflect on the evolving roles of SAHDs in society, and put forth an argument for greater support for diverse kinds of parenting online.

Author Keywords

Stay-at-Home Dads; Role Theory; Self-Presentation; Social Network Sites; Social Media

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION

Historically in the United States, mothers have held the primary role of homemaker and caretaker in the home, while fathers have worked in paid employment outside of the home [43,54]. In recent decades, this imbalance has shifted and mothers have been employed outside of the home in increasing numbers. At the same time, gender roles

are also beginning to shift, with fathers doing more housework and childcare than they previously used to [54].

Although father involvement is growing, societal norms lag in a variety of ways (e.g., “mommy” groups, parenting advertisements targeted towards mothers, etc.). Furthermore, mothers are still doing more overall work inside and outside of the home [54]. This problem was highlighted in Hochschild and Machung’s seminal book, *The Second Shift*, which described the shiftwork mothers took on related to homemaking and childrearing, in addition to their first shift in the workplace [34]. However, in the book, they also share a story of a father finding himself out of place when taking his child to the park because all of the other caretakers in the park are either stay-at-home moms (SAHMs) or female domestic workers [34].

While the father described is still part of a minority group among parents in the U.S., there are currently over 2 million SAHDs and the number continues to rise [49]. Although SAHDs share similar responsibilities as SAHMs—performing domestic work and child rearing duties—SAHDs face distinct challenges. They have to balance their home responsibilities with their identities as men who stay at home with their children, defying traditional stereotypes about gender roles and responsibilities [16,17,58,59,73]. Policies affecting fatherhood, such as paternal leave, vary by country. Even within the western world, there tends to be rather substantial policy differences between social welfare systems in different countries. For example, Lister [48] demonstrates differences arising between the more generous Nordic countries on the one hand and the UK and the U.S. on the other. Our focus is on the experiences of a largely middle and upper class population of SAHDs in the U.S., who share distinctive experiences and goals in their roles as SAHDs.

Recent literature has described how parents go online to find social support and to overcome judgment they might experience in their offline environments [5,6,23,37,62]. However, much of that work has focused on mothers rather than fathers. Research that has addressed the role of fathers in particular examines how two SAHDs use social media, but the sample in the study was small [5]. We build on that work here to understand how SAHDs use social media related to their roles and identities as SAHDs. We explore the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways do SAHDs in the U.S. use social media related to their roles as SAHDs?

RQ2: In what ways does social media support—or inhibit—social roles and identities in the lives of SAHDs?

RQ3: How do social media sites help SAHDs transition to their new roles?

We discuss role theory and impression management in the context of SAHDs and their families. We also describe the “do-it-yourself” language used by fathers to embrace and publicly express their multiple roles and identities. This research takes a first step at understanding how social media supports SAHDs and contributes to a broader agenda of supporting diverse families offline and online.

RELEVANT WORK

Stay-at-Home Dads

SAHDs are a rapidly growing population in the United States. The population of SAHDs nearly doubled from 1989 to 2010 (from 1.1 million to 2.2 million) [49]. The jump has been attributed in part to high unemployment rates around the recession in the early 2000s, but the long-term growth has been attributed to an increase in fathers who stay home for the purpose of caring for their children [49]. Rochlen et al. find that SAHDs reported higher life satisfaction and parenting self-efficacy scores, and lower scores on metrics of gender roles than other fathers of similar age [58]. Zimmerman [75] argued that SAHDs differed from SAHMs mainly in that they do not “socialize with other stay-at-home parents.” She noted that the lack of their socialization might be due to their relatively small numbers which makes finding nearby SAHDs difficult.

Parenting attitudes are moderated not only by parenting beliefs, but also by parents’ own social networks [64]. Rochlen et al. [58], who had used SAHD online networks to recruit participants in their studies, noted that social support is quite important for SAHDs and these fathers might not feel as much support from mother primary caregivers as they would from fellow SAHDs. In a follow-up study, Rochlen et al. investigated two major areas: (1) reasons men give for becoming SAHDs and (2) stigma they experience in that role [59]. They found that 52% of fathers gave “pragmatic” or work-related reasons which typically related to father unemployment or higher earning mothers, while a smaller proportion (35%) noted chance, childcare options, values, and “better fit” as reasons for being SAHDs. In their second line of inquiry, they found that fathers with less social support felt more stigmatized than fathers with greater social support [59]. While SAHDs taking part in Rochlen et al.’s study reported that friends and family generally supported them, they still felt judged by extended family members as well as by mothers in parenting related functions like taking children to playgroups. They also found that SAHDs defined masculinity in “personal and flexible” terms but reported

feeling pressure to be breadwinners, a finding echoed in other SAHD studies as well [17,60,75].

Research suggests that while SAHDs take on the traditionally feminine caretaking role [20], they are still doing “masculine things” like maintaining cars and mowing the grass [17,60]. Doucet [17] termed SAHDs’ work at home as *self-provisioning*. In one example, she described a father who is proud of his renovations and makes “homemade baby food” and award-winning cakes. She also argued that SAHDs attempted to either maintain part-time jobs or work from home in order to maintain traditionally masculine roles.

Social Role Theory

Social role theory stipulates that people follow societally constructed stereotypes. Sarbin [61] argues that social roles represent “the part one is assigned to play” in Goffman’s [24] dramaturgical tradition. The three main concepts of social roles are: (1) social position; (2) role expectations and (3) role enactment [2]. The social position defines the person’s “location in the social system,” for example; husband and wife are two distinct social positions. Role expectations define what people ought to do when assuming a social role. They are constituted through societally constructed stereotypes. For example, men are expected to be more agentic, and women more communal [20]. These perceptions are linked to normatively held views of gender roles, especially the boundary between the domestic (caregiving females) and the professional (working males). Role enactment measures the alignment between role expectations and individual behavior. For example, does a male act as the role expectations suggest? Role ambiguity occurs when people cannot determine the normative expectations of their supposed roles [7]. When people face role ambiguity, they cannot tell “what is desired [of them] and how to do it” [7]. Role ambiguity affects both role expectations which become unclear as well as role enactment which is difficult to measure.

Social expectations change over time. Men in the colonial era in the U.S. used to take part in domestic work such as mending leather clothing (e.g., shoes), and tasks that required “brute force” [14] such as carrying wood and grounding corn. As the U.S. became increasingly industrialized, the work typically ascribed to men moved outside the home and into the city [56], while women took on more domestic responsibilities. This spurred the traditional breadwinning and domestic labor divisions that persist today [14]. Traditions and culture are important in determining how fathers make sense of their roles [39,63]. Even within among a specific cultural group of “White, North American, middle-class” fathers [39], employment differences lead to different perceptions and identities in the role that fathers play (e.g., “stay-at-home” versus “unemployed”) [63].

Eagly argues that the roles and stereotypes held by a society at any time depend not on the cultural traditions of the

society, but on the “contemporary division of labor between sexes” [20]. The “father-as-breadwinner” norm remains strongly linked to the stereotypical view of the male gender [42,56] while the “mother-as-caregiver” stereotype is also derived from mothers’ long-term connection between women and the domestic work [18]. However, gender roles are established and reinforced through social interaction [26]. Mothers enact their gender roles by producing, and reproducing, the appropriate “gender display” [26] (cited in [72]). This might explain the lag between the rising level of fatherhood engagement today and the persistent societal view of fathers as under-engaged [42].

Fathers Enacting Domestic Roles

Recent research shows that while mothers still do more in the domestic sphere than fathers, fathers are closing the gap [44]. A study of families in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 argued that the rise in number of SAHDs might be linked to economic changes which made men’s place in the labor market less certain, and even when they found employment, less stable [10]. Gorman-Murray’s [27] study of upper-middle class families in Sydney after the financial crisis found that the crisis enabled men to invest less in their work and more in the home as a “site of self-worth.” This study described fathers who took on “do-it-yourself” (DIY) projects at home. These projects, including cooking and interior design, became a “creative outlet” for fathers. In one example, a father emphasized, “not only does he do the cooking—he built the kitchen!”

Moisio et al. [51] argue that productive consumption through DIY projects provides men, especially those with lower social and cultural capital, with a conduit to achieve domestic masculinity [51]. Cowan [14] similarly argues that DIY projects have not traditionally been considered feminine, even when dealing with traditionally feminine activities. Women’s magazines would provide DIY advice for women as a last refuge in the “unfortunate” case that they were singlehandedly responsible for domestic work. On the other hand, even men with higher social and cultural capital were found to engage in domestic DIY projects as a masculine asset (e.g., suburban craftsman) [14]. This view was also echoed in Hochschild and Machung when a husband and wife decided on a division of labor that allotted most of the domestic work to the wife in the “kitchen” while the husband’s domestic domain included the “downstairs” in “his” garage. Cleaning the garage while also tinkering in it allowed the husband to negotiate economic conditions and gender norms [34].

Role Transition and Social Support

Role transitions occur when people transition from one “set of expected” behaviors to another set. Another way role transitions occur is when one occupies the same social position while the expected social roles change [2]. Becoming a mother for example, is a considered a role transition [22] and can be a cause for role strain [55]. Blau [8] argued that in any “significant role change the integrity

of the self is jeopardized to some degree.” Allen and Vliert [2] refer to this stress as role strain. Role strain produces a sense of disequilibrium or disorder in the person undergoing role transition [61]. When having to cope with new roles, people use rhetorical acts to disclose their attempts to conform to the role [61]. Sarbin gives the example of the first female coal miner in an Appalachian mine, traditionally a masculine bastion, and how she had to explicitly maintain rhetorical acts that would make her look more like a male coal miner [61].

Johnson and Sarason [36] noted that social support is an important aspect in coping with life changes. Such support allows people to better react to role transitions to eventually arrive at better conclusions as they go through role transitions. Therefore, social support is considered one of the moderators of role transition as is shown in the role transition model suggested by Allen and Vliert [2] in Figure 1. They argue that social support and a person’s network structure are important environmental moderators of role transition in their model.

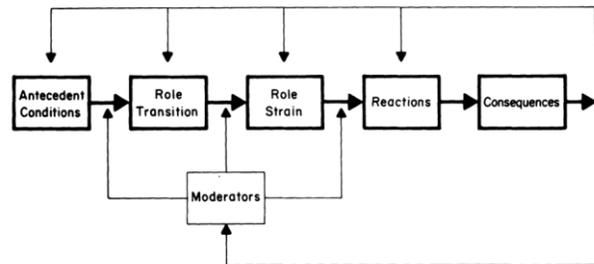


Figure 1. Model for Role Transition Process from [2].

Social support helps people dealing with social role changes through four main paths: “(1) explicit recognition of identities; (2) implicit recognition of identities; (3) pleasant social interactions as an increasingly satisfying dimension of the role; and (4) aid in dealing with problematic or stressful role situations” [30]. Social support through any of these paths can be included in the “moderators” component of the role transition model. These paths allow people to transition more efficiently to new social roles through limiting role strain, which moderates their reactions to role change. Having better consequences when transitioning to a new role is also served by having moderators. It is important to note that social support is reliant on one’s social network structure.

Different Social Network Structures and Social Support

Wellman [71] points out that one’s ties are not always supportive. Most people are members of a number of social networks embedded in different social spheres. The network structures people are embedded in matter. Hirsch [32] provides empirical support to the importance of multidimensional networks in coping with role transitions in his study of recently widowed women and women over the age of 30 who went back to college. He found that

“women with multidimensional friendships could enlarge those spheres of activity [that] ... did not depend exclusively on their former roles as spouse and homemaker” [28] thus allowing them to transition to their new role more easily. Hirsch [31] argues that having lower density social networks with a number of dense clusters would allow one to more easily transition to newer roles.

Since women have increasingly assumed non-traditional roles by accessing the labor market, new social roles for women who became mothers caused role strain primarily due to role ambiguity [22]. Women now had to transition to being mothers, while also considering how that role has changed with new economic realities. Richardson and Kagan [57], cited in Hirsch and Jolly [30], argue that new mothers transitioned to their parenting role better when they had support from less dense networks that were able and willing to “support the woman as a mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law;” that is, when new mothers were able to draw support from multiple dimensions of their networks as they transition to the new role of parenting.

While dense overlapping networks can provide one with a greater amount of support, they can also constrain one’s role transition according to the norms held by the network [28,31]. Low-density, multidimensional networks provide one with a “variegated repertoire of ties” that provide a diverse set of roles within each dimension of their network. People can “shop for” help from different parts of their network when transitioning to new roles [71]. Wilcox [74] offers an interesting example of the disadvantages that one might face when receiving support from densely knit kin networks. He studied the transition of women recently separated. Somewhat paradoxically, family members tended to be emotionally supportive, but at the same time, more judgmental, than non-family members in their networks. To be “more adaptive to the demands of a modern industrial society that is undergoing continuous social change and in which many of its personnel are likely to be highly mobile, both geographically and socially,” [45] one should be able to access different resources from multiple dimensional networks.

Impression Management on Social Media

To examine how SAHDs use social media, we draw on literature on impression management and self-presentation, especially as they relate to gender and parenting. Eagley and Wood [19] suggest that when acting in front of an audience, the salience of “normative standards” increases with self-presentation goals. Leary defines self-presentation as a process in which a person controls how others perceive her [46]. People selectively provide information and react to feedback from audiences in order to maintain a certain self-image [24].

Social media sites provide people with a chance to engage in selective self-presentation [70]. Social media site users make use of the technological affordances of these sites in conjunction with established social norms “guiding online

sharing” to determine what disclosures are more acceptable to share with their online audiences. When users engage in selective self-presentation on social media, they are doing profile work [67]. Vitak [69] argued that audience size and diversity impacts users’ disclosure. Vitak and Kim [68] find that Facebook users engage in self-censorship through private messages, and network management by disaggregating their audiences [69]. Users their study attempted to do so by using “advanced privacy settings such as Friend Lists and [Facebook] Private Groups.” to recreate the boundaries between social group clusters in their social networks offline. Similarly, Lampinen et al. [41] show that individuals make use of different social media sites and maintain separate profiles on the same site to accomplish self-presentation goals. However, using advanced privacy settings can be difficult for many users [68,69] who might prefer to use the less technically demanding lowest common denominator strategy [35]. Parenting issues can be controversial and subjective [1,12] and parents often prefer to discuss parenting issues with other like-minded parents to minimize the negative effects of context collapse [35]. Therefore, context collapse can be especially salient when it comes to discussing parenting.

Posing parenting questions to Facebook networks allows parents to engage in social search behaviors rather than rely on a search engine like Google [3]. Mothers use social media sites to talk about motherhood and share pictures when they have young children [37,53]. They also use anonymous sites when discussing less comfortable parenting and marital issues [62]. Fathers might not want to share private or potentially embarrassing information with close ties. For example, recently divorced fathers turned to Reddit to ask for parenting advice when they perceived potentially judgmental responses on their Facebook networks [5]. Fathers also used closed Facebook groups to share parenting problems that were deemed less appropriate to share on their Facebook wall [5]. Parents, primarily mothers, had to negotiate posts on social media sites with extended members of the family to ensure that appropriate content was posted about the family [3]. We explore and extend these results in the context of SAHDs.

METHODS

We conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with SAHDs. All interviews were conducted with SAHDs in the U.S. Participants were recruited through supporting organizations such as Dad2.0 Summit and The National At-Home Dad Network. We also contacted SAHDs who maintained blogs or public Facebook pages. We advertised a link describing the research project through Twitter, and when possible, contacted individuals who discussed being a SAHD on Twitter via Twitter. Two participants were recruited through a hospital group for expecting fathers.

Interviews were conducted with participants in nine states across the East, the Midwest, and the West. One interview was conducted in person and the rest were conducted over

the phone (n=10) or Skype (n=7). The shortest interview lasted 28 minutes while the longest lasted 76 minutes. We stopped conducting interviews when we reached data saturation and started hearing similar themes from our participants.

Before the interview, participants were asked to complete a short survey that collected basic demographic information, current employment status, and partner employment status (when applicable). All but one of the participants was married. All SAHDs' partners were working full time except for one (SAHD1). SAHD6 was a single father with full-custody and information about his ex-partner was not available. Five SAHDs had part-time jobs, three had full-time jobs (flexible time or self-employed), one was retired, and two were applying for work opportunities at the time the interviews were conducted. All participants identified as SAHDs. Table 1 shows these data about the participants. If the employment field listed fathers as SAHD only, this means that they did not identify an employment status other than SAHD.

The interviews began with questions about participants' daily routines as well as their family structure. We asked participants to describe their role in the home. Then we asked participants about their Internet and social media use. If the participants had a blog or other public presence online, we asked about their motivations for starting the blog and reactions to their posts. Finally, we asked participants about support or judgment they might have experienced as SAHDs both offline and online. All interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo. Each of the transcripts was coded using an inductive process [13]. Themes emerging from the first pass were discussed

between the authors and then we conducted a second coding pass of the transcripts. Overarching themes are reported here.

Limitations

We sampled SAHDs who were actively engaged in their role as parents. Many were also actively engaged online in SAHD communities. As a result, this sample does not represent all SAHDs and more importantly, it may not represent a large number of fathers who are underemployed or in non-traditional blended families and are at home with children but do not identify as SAHDs. We also note that among participants in our study, participants' highest household income was in the \$140,000-199,999 range and the lowest household income was in the \$40,000-64,999 range. Much like Rochlen et al.'s sample [58], SAHDs in our sample may not be representative of the household income of SAHDs in the U.S., and is definitely not representative of the household income of the general population of fathers. Future work should also explore the experience on SAHDs in other parts of the world.

RESULTS

The results are organized around three major themes: how SAHDs overcome isolation through social media, how SAHDs manage roles and relationships, and SAHDs' disclosure behaviors on social media.

Overcoming Isolation and Judgment

SAHDs experienced a great deal of isolation from other adults, especially throughout their children's early years. SAHD6 said that fathers "need[ed] adult time" and SAHD3 noted that "it's good to see somebody else ... dealing with ... a similar situation." For some fathers, being part of SAHM groups was not fulfilling. They thought that

	Marital Status	Degree	Employment	Partner Degree	Partner Employment	# Children	Ages of children	Social Media Use *Related to Parenting
SAHD1	Married	SC	RT	CO	SAHM	3	9, 6, 5	FB*
SAHD2	Married	GS	PT	GS	FT	1	7	FB*; FB Groups*; meetup*
SAHD3	Married	GS	PT	GS	FT	1	11 months	FB*; FB Groups*
SAHD4	Married	GS	PT	GS	FT	2	7, 6	FB*; FB Groups*
SAHD5	Married	CO	PT	GS	FT	2	15, 15	FB; FB Groups; Twitter
SAHD6	Divorced	CO	FT	NA	NA	2	21, 2	FB; FB Groups; Twitter
SAHD7	Married	GS	LW	CO	FT	1	1	FB; Google+*
SAHD8	Married	SC	SAHD	GS	FT	3	11, 3, 3 months	FB*; FB Groups*; Reddit*
SAHD9	Married	CO	PT	GS	FT	1	4	FB*; FB Groups*; Pinterest*
SAHD10	Married	GS	LW	GS	FT	2	8, 5	FB*; FB Groups*; Stack Exchange
SAHD11	Married	CO	SAHD	GS	FT	3	6, 3.5, 3.5	FB*; FB Groups*; Twitter*
SAHD12	Married	CO	PT	GS	FT	1	7	FB*; FB Groups*; Twitter; meetup*
SAHD13	Married	GS	SAHD	MD	FT	5	10, 8, 5, 3, 1	FB*; FB Groups*; Twitter; Pinterest*
SAHD14	Married	GS	FT	MD	FT	1	21 months	FB*; FB Groups*
SAHD15	Married	CO	SAHD	GS	FT	2	7, 10	FB*; FB Groups*
SAHD16	Married	CO	SAHD	MD	FT	1	1.5	FB*; FB Groups*
SAHD17	Married	SC	FT	BA	FT	3	8,7, one month	FB*; Twitter*; meetup*
SAHD18	Married	GS	SAHD	MBA	FT	3	10, 7, 4	FB*; Twitter*; Google+*

Table 1. Participant and partner demographics. SAH[D/M]=Stay-at-home-[dad/mom]. SC: Some College; GS: Graduate Degree; CO: Four-year Degree; MD: Medical Degree; RT: Retired; LW: Looking for Work; PT: Part-Time Work; FT: Full-Time Work.

SAHMs did not necessarily view SAHDs as their counterparts; rather, SAHDs were viewed as fathers who had to take care of the children for a limited period of time.

But the whole purpose of [creating a SAHD Facebook Page] is that I've noticed in the times that I've been a single SAHD, going places that is primarily [frequented by] SAHMs...and then there's just one or two of us dad...I never really feel all that comfortable. I feel like a lot of mothers just think that Daddy's got the day off of work and they don't understand that we are doing the same thing they are. -SAHD6

SAHDs also noted that mothers might have biases against them because they did not fit a specific stereotype.

I've noticed that a lot of moms have this prejudice towards the dad if the dad doesn't fit the stereotype of what's considered super good looking and successful...they see me out with the kids so their first thoughts are I'm a deadbeat because I don't have a job. -SAHD8

Participants reported that they could not or did not want to take part in parenting communities setup with SAHMs because they felt stigmatized and unwelcome in these groups. In fact, being ostracized by SAHMs in parks, malls, and other areas where parents might go with their children was one of the topics that SAHDs frequently posted and commented on in SAHD online spaces. SAHD4 recounted how his children had a fight in the park and some of the mothers tried to intervene, believing that he could not manage the situation. SAHD14 echoed this, saying that mothers “quite often give me more scrutiny at the park.” SAHD15 reported that “at least offline, not overtly. I have occasionally gotten looks [from SAHMs] if I take [my child] up to the park or something in the middle of the day.” SAHD18 also experienced the same kind of treatment at the park. SAHD18 moderates two Facebook groups for SAHDs, one national, and one in his state. In both cases, he thought that the groups were important for providing social support and understanding that might be lacking from mothers who do not deal with the same problems that SAHDs have to deal with.

SAHD Facebook Groups

Facebook groups provided a safe space for SAHDs to ask questions and discuss problems. While all parents experience parenting challenges, many participants reported that they experienced less judgmental responses when they asked for help from other SAHDs.

The stay-at-home dad [Facebook] group is just a place where guys have a...We've found that sometimes dads have trouble asking for help, so if you can go into a group where it's full of your peers and you know that you're not being judged for asking a question or you need help with something, it's a way that you get some parenting advice if you're stuck, or you're potty training your son and he won't go and you don't know

how to fix it. So it's a really good resource for stay-at-home dads who maybe don't know where to turn. - SAHD18

SAHD18 managed a local SAHD Facebook group because he found it difficult to join other stay-at-home parents' groups in the area when his family first moved. SAHD18 said that when he tried to join the groups, “[mothers in the group] said ‘No,’ because I was a man. They didn't feel comfortable with me being a part of [of the group].” However, separating parenting groups by gender goes both ways; he noted that when mothers ask to join the SAHD Facebook group, he, as the administrator for the group, answers, “Thanks for your interest in [our Facebook] group, but it's only for dads.”

Even within SAHD Facebook groups, the boundaries of appropriateness were fuzzy. SAHD18 described how some SAHDs had posted about a date with their daughters on Valentine's Day. Some fathers saw such a post as a “creepy” thing to share, while others felt that this was something both parents and children enjoyed and that there was nothing wrong with it. Despite gender-specific Facebook group behaviors, mothers were generally supportive of SAHDs on social media sites. For example, they were instrumental in introducing SAHDs to parenting groups online. One of SAHD3's friends, who was a SAHM, introduced him to a new SAHD group on Facebook. Both SAHD4 and SAHD9 started blogging about their lives as SAHDs and joined SAHD groups after their female partners suggested they do so. SAHD9, SAHD17, and SAHD 18 noted that when they first started blogging about their new roles, most comments on their entries came from mothers who were quite supportive. SAHD17, a blogger, said that “early on, my audience was mostly women and mostly moms. And so they were pretty positive online.”

However, SAHDs also found that mothers viewed some online parenting discussions negatively and at times responded with judgmental attitudes. SAHD15 blogged about his wife's experience with postpartum depression and faced a lot of negative feedback from mothers who thought that he was sharing information about his wife that he should have kept confidential. While most of the negative commenters were arguing that it was not SAHD15's place to discuss his wife's postpartum depression, he thought that since most blog posts about postpartum depression are by mothers, he was providing some much needed view from the father's point of view.

Other Social Media Sites

In addition to Facebook, SAHDs used other social media sites like Twitter and Pinterest. SAHDs used Twitter to reach wider audiences, advertise blog posts, or to auto-populate content to other sites (e.g., Facebook). SAHD17 commented on how Twitter was useful for connecting with other SAHDs. For example, SAHD17 commented on another SAHD's blog post, which led to a Twitter conversation and ultimately meeting in person and

becoming friends. SAHD18 reported taking part in a “Twitter party” in which he discussed birthday parties for children from a SAHD perspective. Twitter parties usually centered around one topic organized around a hashtag.

SAHDs used Pinterest to generate traffic to their blogs and to look for new projects to do themselves. SAHD13 would “do a blog post about a project and then ...post it to Pinterest, and then if I’m looking for different projects, sometimes I’ll go to Pinterest and say, “Hey, that’s kind of what I want to do.” Only SAHD8 reported using Reddit for parenting purposes. He said that while most responses about parenting on Reddit, especially the more popular ones, were sarcastic and not particularly helpful, he found some of them to be thoughtful. However, he noted that he had to look for them which was a time-consuming process.

Managing Roles and Relationships

Managing Relationships with Partners

Most SAHDs reported a mix of financial and parenting philosophy reasons for staying at home with children. SAHDs felt that when their spouses were making more money than they were, if the family wanted one parent to stay home, it would make more sense for them to do so. SAHD2 noted that his wife was good at keeping regular hours (9-5) at work, while his work hours were not as regular. He felt that in order to stay connected with his children, it would be better to be a SAHD. SAHD3 taught private music lessons, while his wife, a marketing manager, had less flexible hours. That he would stay home with their child was a “no brainer,” because otherwise, his wife would have a “five-year or six-year hole in her career.” SAHD4 echoed this reasoning. He stayed home while his partner held a regular job because as a clinical social worker, he could get substantial income as a part-time worker. Fathers who had flexible working environments, which allowed them to maintain part-time jobs while they remained at home with the children, shared similar stories. Other SAHDs thought that their spouse’s incomes were enough for the family and that paying for childcare services while both parents worked would not make financial sense.

All participants in our sample reported that they were invested in caretaking for their children. SAHD1 thought that this was his chance to be involved in his children’s upbringing. Having retired, SAHD1 thought this was a good chance to have a closer relationship with children from his second marriage. SAHD2 “wanted to undo the mistakes of my father and my step-father.” SAHD15 thought that his character was more suited than his wife’s to be a stay-at-home parent.

Providing for the Family

SAHDs used social media sites to articulate their new roles as stay-at-home parents. SAHD8 reported that he retweeted #AmazonFamily, an online campaign to change the name of the service provided by Amazon Prime for parents from Amazon Mom to Amazon Family. SAHD18 said that he

thought he was providing his family with “another kind of currency [because] you’re providing emotional support.” This was a message SAHD17 tried to articulate in response to a blog post intimating that any father who was “not [a] provider, [was] not Christian.” In his own blog post, he discussed how SAHDs are providing for their families in a different manner; his post received many comments, most of which were supportive.

However, SAHDs also had to contemplate how this more egalitarian role as SAHDs was different from that of the traditional breadwinner role. While they were happy in their new roles, SAHDs in our sample still thought that not having a traditional breadwinning job was a rather significant change in expected social roles.

I guess, work gives you a lot of validation. Feeling like I was doing kind of like what women do...It was a huge adjustment, just the old message. I grew up with work, you work, you work. I always worked full time...And to go from that to not working, I felt, I don’t know, it’s a sense of shame or something that I wasn’t doing what I should be doing. -SAHD4

The SAHDs who were employed part-time usually did most of their work from home and had to balance childcare with their work schedules from home. SAHD12 drew on his work experience as an architect when writing about his experiences as a SAHD on his blog:

When I wrote my first blog post, I realized what I really wanted to write about was what it’s like trying to run an architecture business when you have small children tugging at your elbow. ‘Cause that’s, I mean, that’s where I’m in every day. -SAHD12

While SAHDs were proud of their work history before being SAHDs, they considered what they did at home to be significant and important. SAHD12 had to repeatedly remove spam posted to a SAHD Facebook page wall he managed that contained content about making money while “in your underwear.” To him, such messages devalued what SAHDs were doing and framed them as lazy and unwilling to work.

I think they’re reading the term that says, “stay-at-home dad” and they’re taking from that that the people in the group are in some way, either lazy or unmotivated. And so, it’s the “get rich quick” kind of things that were posted up. -SAHD12

SAHD18, who was an administrator for both a National Stay at Home Network Facebook page and a local SAHD Facebook page, noted that some people “find a stay-at-home dad group and they automatically assume that because you’re in a stay-at-home dads group, you want to make money somehow.” He added that the National At-home Dad Network provided SAHDs with resources about working from home, but they did not allow service providers to advertise on SAHD Facebook groups.

SAHDs stressed that while they are primary caregivers in the family, they are different than SAHMs. A number of fathers noted that they wanted to discuss and participate in what they perceived to be male-oriented topics and activities. For example, SAHD17 discussed soccer online with one of the fathers who followed his blog. He added that most of their discussions “usually [were] not about parenting or kids at all, it’s about those other things that you talk about getting caught up with an old friend.” SAHD6 echoed this view:

“I find that [Facebook groups] becomes an arena for us to feel more like men. I think a lot of people look down on stay-at-home dads, because men are typically supposed to be the providers. And so, we need that time around other guys that understand ...what we’re doing, and be able to just sit there and talk about NASCAR, or football, or anything manly.” -SAHD6

Sharing and Disclosure on Social Media

Selective Disclosure

SAHDs faced challenges when discussing their roles as stay-at-home parents with their family and close friends. SAHD17 reported that using SAHD Facebook groups allowed fathers to “sort of tailor [their] response[s] to the audience” receiving it. Therefore, he preferred to post to SAHD Facebook groups if he thought that family in his Facebook network might misunderstand the “tone” of the post.

And the idea that Facebook posts...[are] going to be read by 85-year-old Grandma and this dad group, say, is going to be read by these dads that understand what it’s like to have a kid crying and when you say, “Oh, I wanted to leave the kid outside and go back in my room and go to sleep.” -SAHD17

Friending family members who were opposed to their roles as SAHDs created a difficult situation for participants. For example, SAHD10 reported that his mother-in-law had reservations about his new role as a SAHD.

I am not [Facebook] Friends with my mother-in-law...My mother-in-law would love to be Friends with us but she does not use the Internet productively. She will send...She will vent on email and on any private message that she can. So unfortunately, we cannot really connect with her on the Internet because she just really uses it very badly. -SAHD10

SAHD17’s mother was opposed to his role as a stay-at-home parent, feeling that the father was supposed to be the breadwinner in the family. As a result, he preferred to only discuss SAHD-related topics when they could talk face-to-face rather than on his Facebook network. SAHD8 had to manage his mother-in-law posting a number of comments pertaining to his being a SAHD that he perceived to be negative. SAHD8 would usually delete the comment and

respond to his mother-in-law through private Facebook messages.

“To me, posting a comment, especially a negative one, is basically public shaming of somebody and I don’t really agree with that. I just delete those comments and say, “Hey, text me or message me privately for stuff like this!” -SAHD8

He tried to dissuade other people from liking or commenting on his mother-in-law’s comments by “turning it into a satire piece.” SAHD9, a blogger, faced a similar problem. His mother-in-law and a close friend contacted him directly when they thought that posts on his blog were personal criticisms of their parenting philosophies. He reported that he needed to explain to them the nature of the post, and that it was a reflection of his own upbringing and parenting lessons he was learning as a SAHD.

SAHD6 posted pictures of his daughter on his Facebook page that a SAHM in his Facebook network commented on, saying that they were sexually suggestive. SAHD6 thought that the comment was unacceptable, sent a private message to the mother to that effect and blocked her from his Facebook wall (and eventually unfriended her). For SAHD6, the mother’s comment represented public rebuke of his parenting style, something he was not prepared to accept.

Managing Privacy

Two SAHDs reported that they were looking for employment opportunities at the time the interviews were conducted. Both SAHDs lost their jobs after the 2008 financial crisis. Both said that they liked SAHDs, but were seeking employment for financial reasons. This was especially true for SAHD10, whose children were now in school, which enabled him to return to work. He used Stack Exchange (SE) regularly to hone his programming skills and shared his SE profile with potential employers. He noted that if he were to post “something controversial” about parenting to Stack Exchange, he would probably create a different account. He later added that most parenting questions were potentially controversial and complex. SAHD7 echoed this sentiment about his Facebook use. He said that while he had been considering setting up a SAHD Facebook page for fathers in his area, he decided against the idea. SAHD7 thought that managing this group might affect his chances of obtaining employment in the future since someone could probably “search [for]...[and] find that [Facebook group].”

SAHDs had to contend with privacy issues online in areas other than future employment. While SAHD13 used his blog to document the DIY projects he was working on with his children, he made a “conscious decision on the blog not to use the kids’ name or to show their faces.” SAHD13 explained that while he did post pictures of his children on his personal Facebook page, he did not post their pictures and did not name them on the blog for safety reasons. SAHD6 posted about his daughter to the Facebook page he

was moderating. However, SAHD6 noted that he would not post all pictures of his daughter to the SAHD page. Some pictures were deemed only appropriate “for friends only, like close friends.” As an example, SAHD6 said that instead of going on a date for Valentine’s Day, he organized an event with his daughter that he posted about on the SAHD Facebook group because “dads who have daughters understand...That was a big moment that I wanted to share.”

“Do-it-yourself” Projects

SAHDs posted online about projects they are doing at home, especially when their children were part of these projects. Some SAHDs told us that they blogged or posted about “DIY” projects they did, sometimes along with their children. SAHD15 thought that the DIY aspect of parenting as a stay-at-home parent was important, regardless of the nature of the projects. As he and his wife were trying to choose a name for his daddy blog, he landed on the name “Daddy Do-it-yourself.” He explained that the blog did not have a specific agenda to start with but that he “posted everything from trying to pick out the right car seat [to] a few recipes” thus presenting a “snapshot into his life” as a stay-at-home dad.

SAHD13 argued that since he had a lower earning potential than his wife, he would try to contribute to house finances through “projects” to make the family more self-sufficient.

I’m not out there earning a paycheck so to be able to bake bread, or have a garden, and... food that we grow...kind of be more self-sufficient so that my family is provided for in that way. -SAHD13

His blog presented him both with a chance to communicate work on these projects with other enthusiasts and to engage in adult conversation.

Being a stay-at-home dad, I am not in an office where I’m talking with adults all the time...The people I’m communicating with are children. So [the blog] was kind of a way for me to have a little bit of communication with adults and I learn at the same time. -SAHD13

SAHD2 posted statuses and photos about how his son and his son’s friend were helping him remodel the bathroom. The Facebook posts documented the progress in the project as well as his child’s involvement in it along with him.

“When we were remodeling the bathroom and [my son’s] friend...was over, and we got them to paint the bathroom. It was the first coat...[so, they] painted the first coat in our newly remodeled bathroom, and I showed pictures of that, pictures of [son] and [son’s friend] in their painting clothes. And they were all smiles. And I thanked them publicly.” -SAHD2

SAHD8 worked on DIY projects for crafts to sell on his Etsy profile. He shared posts about him and his 3-year-old working together on some of these projects. SAHD8 was

also taking classes in a local culinary school, and worked with his child on new meals in the kitchen. He posted many of these pictures on his personal Facebook page as well.

SAHD18 liked to blog about cooking. He said that though he did not like cooking, especially at the beginning of his time as a SAHD, he started seeing it as another way to be creative. Sharing it on his blog was intended to help other SAHDs learn how to also enjoy cooking as a creative endeavor. He also posted about DIY projects that were appropriate for children, such as a post about creating a Thor’s hammer from recycled materials that can easily be found in the house. He argued that, in addition to saving money on an expensive toy, this project provided him with an opportunity to have quality time with his child. It also allowed him to draw on some of his skills from being an arts teacher before becoming a SAHD.

DISCUSSION

Our results show that SAHDs engage in a number of strategic behaviors online to overcome judgment, find other SAHDs, and to navigate disclosure and privacy goals. Participants report being able to navigate some of the judgment through selective disclosure on particular sites, a phenomenon observed in prior studies of families and judgment [4]. They also join Facebook groups for SAHDs, contrasting results from Zimmerman [75] who found that SAHDs did not take part in SAHD socialization events, a difference that might be due to the increasing number of SAHDs today [49]. Strategic use of social media (e.g., using Facebook groups) allowed SAHDs to create more variegated network structures, thus better moderating their transition to the role of SAHD. We draw on Hirsch and Jolly’s four main social support paths for dealing with role changes [30] to explicate social media’s successes at supporting SAHDs, and opportunities for further support.

Explicit Recognition of Masculine and SAHD Roles

SAHDs used social media sites to create “social textures” [29] through which they could form a community in which both their roles as men and SAHDs are respected. SAHDs use social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, which allow them to create public or semi-public profiles that can be traversed and searched by other users [9]. These findings echo prior findings about strategic management of self-disclosure on social media sites [4,5,15,41,68]. SAHDs can find other SAHDs in their geographic area as well as those who might share similar interests or parenting philosophies. This allows them to better transition to their new role as primary caregivers through explicitly recognizing this role change. Hirsch [33] describes explicit role recognition when people give direct, clear signals to others about their performance in a specific role, such as “you’re a great father.” SAHDs support each other by providing such explicit recognition of their role as primary caregivers, often through positive feedback on pictures or statuses about relationships with children.

Implicit Recognition of Masculine and SAHD Roles

SAHDs also use social media sites to provide implicit recognition of each other in both primary caregiver role as well as traditionally masculine roles. SAHDs acted as “stance-taking” entities “taking a position between” [25] identifying with traditional male roles (e.g., displaying DIY projects) while at the same time identifying with traditionally female roles (e.g., primary caregiver role). Participants used social media sites to write about their DIY projects. In this case, they may have been drawing on a DIY identity to express masculinity, a phenomenon observed in prior work [17,27,51,58]. By engaging in projects with their children and sharing these activities online, SAHDs highlight that they can be good fathers [5,38]. Sharing on social media also allows SAHDs to engage in self-affirmation through emphasizing both their identities as caregivers and as agentic males [66]. This echoes Doucet’s [17] finding that SAHDs were proud of their creative products (including domestic activities like cooking) if the creative process allowed them to identify as self-provisioning in the home.

Lindtner [47] argues that identifying as a DIY maker, a traditionally masculine activity, not only provides one with an identity relating to methods of production, but also a “way of being and acting in the world through which other aspects of life were tackled. For instance, being a maker did not mean that one could not be a parent. Rather it meant being a parent differently, committed to teaching one’s child to act in the world in a hands-on and engaged manner.” By employing strategic self-presentation on social media sites, SAHDs can portray both masculine and feminine roles and identities to online audiences. Posting about their DIY projects allows SAHDs to emphasize “rhetorical acts” which might reduce their role strain [61].

Pleasurable Interactions and Dealing with Problems

Facebook groups in particular enable SAHDs to target specific questions to other SAHDs who have shared similar or relevant experiences. SAHDs asked for advice when they faced problems in their new social roles as SAHDs. They also shared pleasurable experiences like the Valentine Day date with their daughters or discussing sports with other SAHDs. Our results echo prior work of fathers’ use of social media [5] that discussed the importance of having Facebook groups specifically for fathers. Such groups allowed fathers to discuss sensitive information that they would otherwise be unlikely to share with others (e.g., marital concerns). As the image of fatherhood, and especially SAHDs, is in flux, and as more men have to make sense of their new roles; quite different from long-held and still salient image of primary breadwinner and family leader, social media sites act as moderators for their role transitions.

Social Support and Context Collapse

SAHDs had to navigate self-disclosure behaviors on social media sites to minimize judgment from extended family, employers, and broader networks. For example, SAHDs

had to contend with negative comments from extended family members, often by choosing to disclose less online. Ammari et al. [3] described how parents manage disclosures about their children on social media. In their work, fathers were particularly sensitive to content that might have been perceived as sexually suggestive, especially of their daughters. These results echo prior work showing that stigmatized identities tend to be kept private [60,75]. Facebook networks tend to mirror and reinforce offline social networks [21,40] which might be too dense for SAHDs to “shop for help” [71] in transitioning to the role.

However, controlling who becomes a member of their Facebook groups can support SAHDs in better transitioning towards their new roles. Women transitioning into new roles outside of their traditional domestic role were better able to cope with the change when they were members of multidimensional networks loosely connected to their family members [32]. Women transitioning to being single after marital separation intimated that their close-knit network members were more judgmental than more distant members [74]. SAHDs in our study relied on multidimensional networks consisting of offline meetings with other SAHDs, online social networks on Facebook [21,40], support from SAHMs following their blogs, and creating Facebook groups that were explicitly and exclusively for SAHDs in order to moderate their role transition. As the title of the paper suggests, fathers feel that it is important to control who might be members of the Facebook groups. They thought this might allow them to ask for advice and discuss problems without feeling stigmatized. These findings echo results from Ammari et al. [4] that show how parents of children with special needs found their families to be more judgmental than other members of their networks who were also parents of children with special needs themselves. In Ammari and Schoenebeck [5], fathers also intimated that they shared more personal problems on private Facebook groups with other fathers.

SAHDs also expanded their social networks by using other social media sites (e.g., Twitter, Pinterest, Twitter, StackExchange). Morris et al. [52] argue that people tend to use Q&A sites that are more anonymous than social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) when asking “overly personal questions” (e.g., about dating, parenting, etc.). Such questions are not deemed acceptable to share on their Facebook Walls. Fathers also use more anonymous sites like Reddit when facing more stigmatized cultural positions (e.g., divorce, being single parents) to ask questions and seek advice [5]. In this study, SAHD8 turned to Reddit when asking questions about his new role as a SAHD. Similarly, SAHDs looking for work also managed their self-presentation related to being a SAHD so that they would not risk future employment opportunities. SAHD10 noted that he would consider asking questions about parenting as a SAHD on StackExchange only if he used a throwaway account. Those facing socially stigmatized roles

have used throwaway accounts in other contexts. For example, De Choudhury and De [11] show how those facing mental health problems use throwaway Reddit accounts for anonymity purposes.

Having such multidimensional networks helped SAHDs transition to more domestic roles as opposed to traditionally breadwinning male-centric roles while at the same time allowing them to maintain masculine roles through engaging in traditional masculine activities such as taking part in sports events, discussing sports and cars, and describing DIY projects. This allowed them to make sense of both their role change to parenthood as well as a dynamically changing and ambiguous role expectation as SAHDs. These multidimensional social networks also provided SAHDs with social support and shielded them from family criticism such as that from mothers and mothers-in-law.

Finally, our data reveal a lack of norms about what is appropriate for SAHDs to disclose on social media, a finding that echoes Ammari and Schoenebeck's [5] study of fathers' use of social media. McLaughlin and Vitak [50] argue that online sharing norms provide the basis to acceptable posts on social media and those that call for sanctions. Lack of norms about what is appropriate to share had a chilling effect on what SAHDs shared on their Facebook networks, pushing them to rely on Facebook groups specific to SAHDs. As a result, Facebook groups provide a safe online space for SAHDs to discuss parenting problems they face, but they also constrict the population that might provide answers to such problems. More critically, opportunities for advocacy and social change are lost when SAHDs retreat to closed groups to share about their lives. Stavrosito and Sundar [65] argue that mother blogs empower women and allow them to maintain a sense of belonging and agency; we observe similar patterns with SAHDs and encourage a research agenda to further empowerment and acceptance of SAHDs.

CONCLUSION

SAHDs are a growing demographic in the U.S. today but little is known about their Internet and social media use related to their roles. We find that they turn to social media to overcome isolation and judgment they might experience in other contexts. They also turn to social media to display their identities as loving caregivers as well as their identities as do-it-yourself men who produce things around the house. This work surfaces a tension SAHDs experience between embracing what have been traditionally feminine roles with expressing their male identities to online audiences. Though being a SAHD is becoming more acceptable in the U.S. today, SAHDs still experience stigma and judgment both online and offline. SAHDs make use of a number of strategies to create and maintain multidimensional networks enabling them to better cope with the role transition. We argue that social media sites provide a rich but underutilized opportunity to better

support SAHDs as well as to increase societal acceptance and appreciation of diverse parenting roles and identities.

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