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Mr. Mom and Mrs. Breadwinner: A Personal Account

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family and the Holy Family. That point was that family is more important than the individuals or the affair. The family was more important for many reasons, probably the most significant being their property and mission. If we were truly interested in *the family*, either as a propertied entity or as a mission for the son like that of the Holy Family, we would value it sufficiently not to let it be destroyed over an affair.

But the reality is that we value the individual above all and thus consider an affair an affront to another individual. In our world, we do not often welcome back the conquering hero who just happened to have come across a nymph. After all, he betrayed the almighty “me.” Never mind that he may long since have realized that his family is more important to him (and he to his family) than a nymph. Nor do we value the quiet man who steps into the background so that a son or daughter can fulfill his or her mission. If we did, we would cherish the success of our children more than the last outburst of our sexuality.

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Mr. Mom and Mrs. Breadwinner: A Personal Account

Audrey Falk—Towson University

My husband and I are Mr. Mom and Mrs. Breadwinner. I work a full-time job and provide the medical and other benefits as an assistant professor at a metropolitan university while my husband, Jonathan, takes care of our sons, Benjamin, two and one-half, and Jacob, eight months. Jon works a few hours per week at a bookstore and occasionally as a personal running coach (via the Internet and the telephone); the second job is his passion and the

first gives him a needed escape to the world of grown-ups on a routine basis.

Jon and I assumed our roles for financial and ideological reasons. I was in a position to support our family; Jon was between professional roles and did not have a job that could support us. We both preferred the idea of having one of us home with our children over the alternative of sending our young ones to daycare. Thus, when our first son was born in 2008, we decided to try out the roles of Mr. Mom and Mrs. Breadwinner. We entered these roles cautiously and accepted that it might be a short time before we needed to come up with an alternative plan.

Although happy as a couple and as parents, we find being Mr. Mom and Mrs. Breadwinner uniquely challenging. Despite the fact that there are about 154,000 stay-at-home dads in the United States ("America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2010," U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, see <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>) as well as a growing number of dads who are more involved and engaged in their children's lives, when my husband goes out and about with our boys—to the playground, to the community center, to the library, and so forth—he does not feel fully included in the banter, commiserating, and laughter that flows seemingly effortlessly between the moms. It is not that he is mistreated; no one is blatantly rude to him, and perhaps it has more to do with his own introversion than anything else. But he often comes home from such activities feeling dejected, more isolated than perhaps he would have if he had spent the morning at home with our boys.

Sometimes when Jon is out with the boys he encounters other dads who are also alone with their children. Yet even the dads do not extend affection toward Jon. Are these dads too macho to extend a little warmth toward one another? In formal programming, Jon finds a proliferation of "Mommy and Me" activities with no corresponding "Daddy and Me" programs. He wonders if he is welcome at these programs and whether he should attend. Jon's experience suggests that stay-at-home fathers may experience isolation that is beyond, or at least qualitatively different from, the isolation often experienced by stay-at-home moms.

I, too, feel isolated. Although I know that more are out there, I know only one other Mrs. Breadwinner. While there are stay-at-home dad groups available on the Internet and face-to-face in some communities, I am not aware of any formal support networks for breadwinning moms. Yet, on average, women still earn about 80% of men's pay ("Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2009," Report 1025, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2010). Mrs. Breadwinners, unlike men who are the primary or sole providers for their families, are still the ones to become pregnant, birth, and nurse children.

Our families are accepting of our atypical roles. However, when we tell extended family, acquaintances, or people we happen to meet about our roles within our family, they sometimes appear uncertain how to respond. I have found that some individuals can only accept us if we put our situation in the context of the economy and pretend that the situation is only temporary, until the economy changes and Jon lands a great job. When these individuals see us as doing what we need to do to support our family, our situation makes sense to them. Some seem unable to believe that we are choosing a nontraditional arrangement because it works for us and when they begin to suspect that we derive satisfaction and fulfillment from our roles, they are confused and wonder what is wrong with us.

When we were expecting our first child, the books and articles we read about pregnancy and parenting foreshadowed some of the challenges that we have encountered. The parenting books we found were mainly written for women and about women. They didn't explain in a serious or equitable way the role of men. For example, one book we have at home includes tips for a dad in the sidebars. Examples include buying his wife a present or taking her out to dinner. Even before our boys were born, we knew that these texts were not speaking to us and to our situation in a way that made sense. My children's father is not a sidebar. We were both excited when we found a book written explicitly for expecting dads, but it was dumbed down to such a degree that it was laughable.

In some ways, my husband and I assume traditional gender roles. My husband pays when we go out to eat, for example; he takes out the trash and deals with gutters and mice. I, on the other

hand, wash the dishes, send cards, schedule doctor and other appointments, and maintain our social calendar. While we challenge some social norms, we embrace others as opportunities to be “normal.”

We fantasize about switching roles. I sometimes have the sense that Jon thinks whatever I am doing at the moment (working at my job, caring for the children at home, and so forth) must be the easier or better task. But we haven't given serious consideration to a role change.

As for our children, we believe they are fortunate to have two very involved parents. Beyond the love and nurturing that they get from both of us, it is hard to know how they will be different by virtue of our atypical arrangement. We hope that they will grow up to challenge stereotypes, embrace differences, and be open-minded to imagination and possibility.

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Back to the Future: Three-generation Families in a Changing Economy

Pat Oles—Skidmore College

The era of the nuclear family is ending. Adolescents leave home later, delaying marriage, family, and career far longer than recent generations. In addition, with the elderly living longer, the middle generation must also care for their parents. With young adults staying or returning home and the middle generation caring for the elderly, the three-generation household is back.

The Generation X (Gen X—those born from the 1960s until about 1982) parenting style developed out of the experience this group had with divorce, work-family conflict, financial constraint, and ineffectual social institutions as children. An elevated psychological and financial investment in their children produced a parenting style some described as intrusive and over-involved. Competitive nursery schools and soccer moms became iconic representa-