

Chapter from

Superdads

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CHAPTER 6

Superdads

While much of the previous research on fathers and employment finds that fathers work more hours than men without children, supporting an emphasis on the breadwinner role, there is mounting evidence that the relationship between parenthood and work hours is not so simple.¹ Some studies show that the effect of a first child has weakened among more recent cohorts of fathers.² Other studies show that married fathers do not increase their work hours.³ Furthermore, other studies show that some groups of fathers, namely men with continuously employed wives and egalitarian fathers, actually reduce their hours of employment.⁴ In fact, a recent report by the Families and Work Institute finds that, in general, men's work hours fell more between 2002 and 2008 than women's work hours, resulting in a smaller gender gap in work hours.⁵

We already know that lots of fathers experience work-family conflict, and balancing work and family is a challenge for men as well as women. We've seen "old" dads who fit the description of breadwinner, making little adjustment to their work lives, and facing little conflict as they align their worker role with their father role. We've also seen "new" dads who struggle quite a bit and make small adjustments to their work lives, often working within the system to take advantage of benefits they already have, such as consolidated schedules or autonomy, or making most efficient use of their time by separating or blurring their work and family roles.

Now we come to the superdads, those men who make large changes to their work lives in direct response to their role as father. Among their strategies, these fathers quit jobs, change careers, change positions, start their own business, adopt flexible work schedules, take on shift

work, and work from home. Among couples who are trying to share parenting, flexibility is crucial in choosing jobs, and shared parenting is on the rise as almost one-half of men and one-third of women report an equal or male-skewed division of child care.⁶ For superdads, shared parenting and greater involvement with their children drive their decisions, especially when it comes to changing jobs and careers. These fathers also make use of workplace flexibility, the most commonly mentioned family-friendly policy.⁷ However, flexible scheduling looks quite different for professional fathers compared to working class fathers. Among fathers with professional occupations, arranging part-time work and flexible start and end times is a good strategy for balancing work and family. On the other hand, shift work is a common strategy among working class parents as it allows for reduced child care costs and increased time with children. In fact, 25 percent of American preschoolers with employed mothers are regularly cared for by their father.⁸ Finally, while older studies have found that women's but not men's decision to work at home is influenced by their family responsibilities, this may be changing as more men become involved fathers.⁹ This chapter focuses on married and cohabiting superdads while the next chapter focuses on single superdads.

JACOB'S STORY – QUITTING

As soon as we sat down to talk, Jacob brought up the fact that he works around his kids' schedule. With two children in elementary school, one of whom attends half-day kindergarten, Jacob generally doesn't have more than two or three hours at a time to work during the day. As a writer, he has the flexibility to set his own hours and place of work:

I work at home and I typically work in the morning, take my kids to school in the morning, work, pick my kids up from school, play with my kids, then my wife comes home, we deal with dinner stuff, put the kids to bed, and then I usually work at night. So I'll work from 8:30 in the morning, usually by the time I get back home, I'll work from 8:30 to 11:15 in the morning and then I'll work from 9 to 1 am. Then I get up and start it all over again.

Jacob uses his flexibility to work at times that are convenient to his family. Jacob has always had a passion for writing and ignored earlier advice to “get a career and put [his] writing on the back burner.” Yet he taught English at the high school and college level for many years in order to have a steady income. During this time, Jacob engaged in both teaching and writing “relatively full time,” which meant long hours. However, once kids came along this double duty “became impossible.” For Jacob, it was a matter of juggling multiple roles and coming up short in his role as father. When he realized that he couldn't manage both of these roles while also being a good father, he decided to quit his teaching job:

My theory is I can do two things at once, I can't do three. I can kinda do three, but I definitely can't do four and the fourth would be teaching full-time. I was teaching full-time, being a dad, being a husband, or I can write full-time and be a dad, be a husband, but I can't write, teach, be a dad, be a husband... but the most challenging part of it is I want, you know, being a good dad is an extremely high priority for me.

In his mind, Jacob chose to be a good father. He is quite deliberate in his ordering of priorities, admitting that his role as father takes precedence over his role as husband. Nevertheless, in choosing writing over teaching, Jacob is also able to follow his passion for a chosen vocation. As with fathers who switch careers or jobs, he took a financial risk to make this change, but found this risk acceptable. Now Jacob schedules his writing around his children so that he writes while they're at school or after they go to bed. This allows him to be involved in their daily routines before and after school to a degree that was not possible before he quit teaching.

While his wife works as an elementary school teacher, Jacob has come to be the primary caregiver for his children. After dropping his kids at school, he can work for a few hours in the morning. However, his son's kindergarten schedule means he's back at the school by 11:30 to pick him up. Even this daily task can remind Jacob of his strong feelings for his kids:

I'll pick my son up at 11:30 like he doesn't know I'm there, or thinks I'm not there and I look at his face and he's just distraught, about ready cry and then he looks at my face, and then all that tension and fear washes away out of his face in an instant; he's happy; a beautiful moment, a kinda thing that you live for in a way. There are always moments in every day where I feel that with my kids; I just adore my kids.

He then has about three hours to feed and play with his son, and maybe fit in some work during his son's naptime, before returning once again to the school to pick up his daughter. Jacob spends the rest of the afternoon alone with both children until his wife's arrival between 4 and 5. Jacob

enjoys spending time with his children and being a dad. Again, he sees his role as dad as being “extremely high priority.” His commitment to parenting also comes out when talking about his parenting style. He has particular views about parenting that he recognizes add to his time commitment. He emphasizes what others have coined democratic parenting and what he calls “rational parenting”:

[It] is the idea of bringing your kids into a rational discussion process about what the group needs in order to be able to move forward and get things accomplished, while at the same time you’re also acknowledging their needs, but they need to recognize where their needs fall in this group, this family. And it works extremely well, it’s very time consuming, it also tends to create kids that are very verbal because you are constantly talking to them about things. I don’t say “because I said so,” what I say “I understand that you want to go play in the front yard right now but it’s getting dark and I’m making dinner and I can’t watch you.” You know, you go through a whole explanation of it. And of course then it becomes this discussion (laughs), which is maddening... But it’s a great way to raise kids because it raises kids who are intelligent and verbal and know how to engage with adults. But it also tends to be highly labor intensive because you aren’t taking a short cut to a decision. You take the long way around.

Through democratic parenting, Jacob is able to emphasize the communication skills that are such a big part of his own vocation. But he also knows that it means more time and effort in raising his children. And all of this time with his children and effort to balance work and family means

that he feels as though he's being pulled in both directions.

I really would like a time where I would just work for a section of the day and then I don't work for the rest; I'd like to try that out, because I'm getting fatigued with the whole things of work and family, it's so draining. Being with the kids, and really being with them takes a lot of energy, and I'm having less energy at night than I used to have and I kinda just like the idea of getting up, going to an office.

Jacob craves uninterrupted time, both in terms of work so he can think and write and in terms of his family so he can spend time with his kids without thinking about deadlines. In other words, he wants to be able to devote full attention to his work and full attention to his kids. He is tired because he is constantly either working or "being with the kids" and constantly going back and forth between the two. For him, being a father is a very active role so he puts quite a bit of energy into his time with his children. Jacob's goal is to separate work and family more, which he thinks will be possible once his youngest starts school full-time.

[Working at home] is good because it's flexible and I can pick my kids up from school every day which I love doing, and spend time with them in the afternoon, but it's difficult because I do work at home and so it tends to feed my already hyper-developed work-aholicism, and I'll tend to go to work whenever I want... I have a tendency to work whenever I can which means, the kids are occupied so I can go upstairs and start writing.

But he also tries to combine the two sometimes. He says he can do some “less needy” tasks while his son hangs out with him in his office. But he usually just focuses on his son when he’s around. Once his son goes to first grade he’ll have an expanded writing schedule and looks forward to keeping his writing focused in one time period and his family the rest of the time.

Unlike Jacob, Reggie had no immediate back up plan when he quit his job as an electronic technician. Reggie was basically fed up with how his employers were treating him. At the time that he quit, Reggie was the only technician at the factory working second shift. His hours were supposed to be from 2 in the afternoon until 10 at night, but he was regularly called in early or kept late, and he worked every Saturday making it a six-day work week. Reggie relayed an instance in which a machine broke right at the time of the shift change, resulting in him getting off work hours late:

I say, well you know, this machine’s down. He’d say, “Well it broke down right at 10:00 so you need to go fix it.” So I’d go and fix the machine and then my wife would call and say, “What time are you gonna be home?” I say, “I’ll be home—I’m due to get off now.” Then I’ll start working on the machine, the next thing I know, it’s 12:00, 1:00 in the morning. Then I get home and everybody’s asleep... you hired me from two to ten, not whenever you want me to come in. Sometimes they’d call me in at 10:00 in the morning, I’d work to 2:00 the next morning. And just, I didn’t like that... You know, we in financially, in pretty good financial shape. We’re not in the best, but we can get just about anything we want. Or go any way we wanna go. You know, it’s not like I’m burdened down with bills or anything. And you know, I told him that. I told him today, I’ll go bag

groceries, and they didn't believe me for the longest time... And so I left.

For Reggie, the particular job was not as important as having time with his family. His boss didn't believe that he would really "go bag groceries" but Reggie saw it as just another job. He had tried to tell his boss that he needed more time at home and church, but his boss was not responsive. Reggie said, "it was wearing me down and I didn't have no family time, so I let them have it." A few days after he quit, his boss called him to come back to work. Reggie was able to negotiate and change to the first shift with half as many Saturday shifts. As with other superdads, Reggie felt it was important that his boss understood how important his family time was.¹⁰ Now he works 7 to 3 so he's able to spend time with his son after school. His boss also lets him leave for functions at his church.

LUIS' STORY – CHANGING CAREERS

I: So you don't compare yourself to other fathers?

R: No, definitely not. I compare myself to what I view as not necessarily the ideal but what my son needs and deserves that's what I compare myself to, which is more of an idea, not a model from some other person so I definitely compare myself to that and strive to be that, it's something that I guess I construct on my own.

The most extreme decision a father could make, short of staying home or quitting one's job, was to switch careers. This occurred when a man's career was particularly problematic for family life

and he saw the need and opportunity to change. Luis was a bit unique in that not only was he constructing his own vision of fatherhood but his own family-centered world. He was the only person to completely dismiss my question about balancing work and family:

I don't seek a balance. A balance is not something that I'm concerned with, my concern is spending as much time as possible with my kid and paying the bills so that's why I worked real estate, I tried to, you know, just hang out with my family and still, you know, possibly make enough money to pay the bills.

Luis is extremely family-centered. In talking about his kids, he said, "they're my life. They're why I do everything I do." He mixes a bit of traditional and egalitarian ideology as he talks about his wife's role and his own: "I don't mind if she works, I just want her to spend enough time with the kids. I want that to be the primary focus and so do I. That's why I went with real estate so I could stay home with the kids as well." Like traditional men, Luis wants his wife to be at home with their children as much as possible, and he feels an obligation to provide for his family (e.g., paying the bills). At the same time, Luis possesses a distinctly egalitarian view in his desire to stay home with his children, too. He does not expect only his wife to focus primarily on the kids but expects the same of himself.

Luis has worked in casinos for about eight years. He has been in school on and off since graduating from high school, about 12 years ago. He admits that finishing school has taken longer than expected. In an effort to finish school and move closer toward his career goal, Luis needed to find a job that could pay the bills while providing flexible hours. At the time, the area

was experiencing a real estate boom and so Luis seized the opportunity to switch jobs, allowing himself to make money, go to school, and spend time with his family. Luis describes the change in schedule and the reason for this change:

My work schedule has changed from the mandatory hours that I worked at the casino to real estate where I set my own schedule... With respect to my kids, they're the reason I did that. They're the reason I changed my schedule and try to stay home as much as possible... in real estate you set your own hours. So I definitely stayed home more.

Luis's decision to quit his job at a casino and try real estate was based on spending time with his children. When we talked, he was spending two or three hours each morning with his kids before getting on with the tasks of the day, which included real estate business and studying for the law school entrance exam. Luis' ultimate career goal is to become a lawyer who will be able to make good money and set his own hours, goals tied back to his children. He sees law as a way to become the type of father he wants to be, one that can be there and one that has stable, professional employment. In choosing a law school, his decision-making process has been very much in line with other education and employment decisions as his role as father takes center stage. While there are two accredited law schools in the area, one school only allows full-time students. This would not fit with Luis' other responsibilities: "I'm a working father. I can't work full-time, go to law school full-time, and spend any time with my family." This means that he has one option for law school. He notes that there is a big difference in the ranking of the two schools but this doesn't matter: "my goal is not to go to the best school possible and get on with the best

firm and work my way up. I want to be home with my kids, so it's not that big of a concern at all to go to such a prestigious school." Luis pictures a future in which he works flexible hours, is financially comfortable, and spends a lot of time with his kids. He thinks the best way to do this is to have his own practice. Again and again, he expressed that his primary goal is not to make money but to spend time with his family. In this sense, he is open to working for a firm as long as it meets his requirements of flexibility.

I say work for myself because I am assuming that that will be more flexible hours. If I work for a firm that allows me to have time with my family, I won't necessarily need to work for myself, that's just the way I envision it as the most flexible schedule so I can be with my kids, go to his games, go to my daughter's whatever. I want to have more kids.

Through all his decisions about work and school, it's clear that Luis is thinking about his kids. It's as though he sees the world through dad-tinted glasses.

Some fathers felt as if they had had enough of their old jobs, and in these cases, the men were almost pushed out of jobs or careers. Charlie, who is in the process of changing careers from hotel management consultant to real estate, came to that point when he realized his travel was keeping him away from his two young daughters for extended periods of time:

It was tough being away because I would come home every day [when I wasn't traveling]. I knew that going into it, however he said that it would be, you know, two and a half months and it turned into three and a half to four... And that's one of the reasons I'm in

real estate school now because I want to stay home, you know, and work from home and not do that as much or at all.

Charlie didn't necessarily blame the structure of consulting for hotels but came to the conclusion that this type of work was not conducive to family life. He no longer wanted to be away from home for months at a time, and instead decided to switch careers to one in which he'll be able to work from home and therefore be around his daughters more. Robert, now a supermarket manager, came to his decision a little later. After working several years in restaurant management, he decided he was missing his daughter growing up:

All of a sudden I looked up and said, "Wow, the higher up I get, the more travel, the more nights, the more holidays, the more weekends." And my daughter was... she was six, she was starting first grade, or started kindergarten... and I just said, "This has gotta go. My wife and my kid have a day job and I've got this crazy job and I'm like the roommate that pays the bills so to speak." I'm really not feeling connected *nearly* to the point that I wanna be. It just wasn't what I was about. So I career transitioned. That was hard financially. And I probably still pay for it a little bit. But it's been awesome though as far as all of the things that I can do now and having a regular sleep schedule and you know everything else—it's been great. So it's been *well* worth it.

When he was working in the restaurant business, Robert compared his wife to a single mom. He let her down several times and found it difficult to keep his word regarding when he might get

home: “as much as you want to keep a commitment, you just couldn’t many a time.” This meant that he might not get home until 9:30 even after telling his wife he’d be home at 6. As with other fathers, Robert’s decision had economic repercussions. Still, Robert’s only regret is that he didn’t switch careers sooner. He feels he has escaped the plight of many fathers who look up when their child is grown and say “where have I been?” While he admits that time flies, he says, “I can remember that time, I know what we’ve done for the last five years.”

GREG’S STORY – CHANGING POSITIONS

Greg met his partner ten days after she gave birth. He recalls how they met at a friends’ apartment while he was on a break from college and how they just clicked. As soon as he finished school, they moved in together and have been a family ever since. While his son’s biological father used to take him every Sunday, there is currently no regular schedule and Greg says he can’t remember the last time his son visited his biological father. Greg emphasizes that he himself has been there for his son from the beginning: “I mean, he has grown up with me as dad in the household. And that’s the way it’s always been.” Greg has an egalitarian outlook and is very offhand about their division of labor:

We’ve always shared responsibilities, so I don’t want it to seem like she’s done more than me or I’ve done more than her. But in my eyes it’s kind of been an equal thing. Ya know, those duties have just really been shared. I don’t think one of us did more than the other—in my opinion. Again, I’ve dressed him up, bathed him, I mean, it’s normal, I

guess it's a normal as normal can be lifestyle.

Greg works in a community organization and is devoted to this kind of work. He talked about how he used to work long hours, either opening or closing the center (and sometimes both) and going in six or seven days a week. But as his son got older and started school, Greg felt as though he was missing out on family time, being at work or in bed whenever his son was home during the week. He describes his choice to switch from one department to another at his workplace:

My desire to get away from membership was because my little boy at that time had just started school. So six or seven days a week, open to close just didn't suit the family lifestyle. For me it was more, I just, with [son] starting kindergarten, and me not being there either in the morning to see him off to school or at night before he went to bed. I just couldn't deal with it anymore... Truly that decision was based on the fact that [son] had started school, and I was missing him. I was missing, ya know, him starting to grow up in kindergarten. I was at work. I was at work when he went to bed. I was at work when he woke up in the morning, I was in bed. So I was missing those things. And again, it was six and seven days a week, so there was no weekend time either. Mom was getting all the joy and the fun, and I was missing it. And I didn't like it, so I made that decision.

Greg was able to find a fulfilling position within his work organization as an after-school director. He took a pay cut in changing positions but said that money was not a factor in his decision. First, he didn't grow up with money so it's generally not a driving force in his

decisions. He knows how to get by, how to spend money and save money. Second, his partner makes more money, enough to live comfortably. Therefore, he could base his decision on what kind of work would “suit the family lifestyle.”

Besides a four-hour window when he needs to be at work, Greg has quite a bit of flexibility in his schedule:

I pretty much make my hours. After school goes from 2 to 6. I am always going to be there from 2 to 6. Now the flexibility comes in the morning or after 6. Mainly I’m at work between 8 and 9. [Son]’s off to school at 7:40, so he’s gone, and I am usually going to work. So the flexibility is wonderful because I don’t have to be at work at any set time other than the fact that I’m always going to be there between 2 and 6.

Along with his personal change and effort to be more involved in his family life, Greg feels there has been a shift in attitudes at his workplace, and he talks about himself and his younger co-workers as the new generation:

This new generation... we want to serve our members. We want to serve the community. However, we understand that we have a family life that we cannot neglect. Ya know, it is...because it’s very easy to get sucked into work... you could spend well over 13, 14 hours and not even realize it because you’re just engulfed in what you’re doing. But the newer side of the staff that’s in our branch, ya know, we know that when it’s over, work is over. It’s over... You’re giving [work] your all for 2 hours to 10 hours, but when I go

home it's family time. You still have to take care of and nurture your family.

So, this new generation of employees wants a better work-family balance. They are passionate about the work they do in the community but also want to be good parents. Given his ability to change positions and the positive work environment, Greg speaks about his organization with great praise:

Luckily enough for me I am at [organization] because I know a lot of parents, a lot of the parents that I see in our program are in the banking industry, so they spend a lot of time away from their kids. We probably spend more time with their kids than they do, especially during the week. So I could not imagine a better job for a mom or a dad than [organization] because of [organization]'s flexibility in their schedule... there's an opportunity somewhat for time for you to spend time with your child while you're at work. And I couldn't imagine working anywhere else.

He continues by noting how the flexibility he has allows him to take off when his son is sick:

I love having flexibility because nine times out of ten, I'll take...I mean, because...it's easier for me to leave work, especially when I don't have a meeting in the morning. It's just easier for me to leave than it is for [partner]... So it's just easier for me just to do it. And I have that flexibility. So it's great. Not an issue. Any time he is sick, I'll take him. Unless mom just wants the day off from work, then she'll take off. But nine times out of

ten, I'll just take off. It makes more sense.

Now Greg is able to walk his son to the bus stop, meet him for lunch occasionally, check in on him in the after school program, and take him home when his shift is over. He feels that he is in sync with his son: "And then my little one is in after-school. So now he's there and I'm there, and when I leave at 6 he leaves at 6. So it's nice to be able to spend that time with him and work with him and then also I'm home to help with homework and to help with dinner and those things, so that's a blessing." Greg has come to the ideal place. He is only really apart from his son while his son is in school. Otherwise, they are both at his workplace together or they are both at home together.

Andrew, an underwriter, also changed jobs in order to spend more time with his children. He describes why his current job is the right one for him:

It's a good job in the fact that you kind of, well, what you should do is when you have kids, you need to kind of rearrange your priorities. I took a step down from management when my wife decided to go back to work. The reason I took the job I did was for the hours... This job, I like this job because to me, money isn't everything. Yeah, I'd like to make more but what I have to give up isn't worth it. So for where I am and what my needs are, it suits me fine.

Andrew had been in management working 55 to 60 hours per week. When he applied for his current job at a local bank, his employer thought he was overqualified. However, Andrew

convinced his boss that he wanted this job and would do well at it. Andrew engaged in a “new type of conversation” before taking the job, one that emphasized his priority on family.¹¹ Now he’s able to stagger the workday with his wife so that he goes in earlier while she takes their daughter to daycare and then he gets off earlier and picks her up in the afternoon. As a result he can be the “hands-on father” that he wants to be. It is important to note that Andrew takes full ownership of his decision. He feels strongly that, “people make their own decisions for what they want to do.” What he wants to do is be there for his daughter and this meant switching jobs and reducing his work hours so that he could be home more. Greg and Andrew represent a small but significant trend of new fathers with employed wives and/or egalitarian attitudes who decrease their work hours when becoming a parent.¹²

NIK’S STORY – SELF-EMPLOYMENT

After working in the furniture business for several years, Nik started up a moving business. He does mainly local residential moves and specialty item transportation. He enjoys the work and helping people over short stretches of time. Though there are occasional disputes over broken items, Nik likes that he can avoid long-term entanglements with customers. On the family side, Nik and his wife had a rocky start. After living together for a couple of years, she got pregnant and he ran off. Nik had been using drugs since he was a teenager and at the time his addiction took him to “a dark place.” With his future wife’s help, he made an effort to break his addiction by going through a treatment program (he still attends DA). Once clean, they got married. At the time, his wife was taking their son to a daycare near her work. When his son turned two, they

found themselves in transition with daycare so he decided to stay at home with his son for a couple of months. At that point, he stopped advertising and limited his business to a few word of mouth clients. Now business has picked up a bit more but is still pretty slow so in between moves he works on projects at home as they prepare to sell their house and build a new house. His son is in a local daycare and Nik explains their family schedule:

[My wife's] the main breadwinner now so her schedule's first. She goes to work, she gets to the bus in the morning... catches the bus at 6:30 in the morning. I get [son] up. I try to wait for her to leave sometimes before I get him up... have him awake and dressed by 7, latest he sleeps is 7:00, have him dressed and ready to go, fed, teeth brushed, trying to potty train, all that kind of stuff in the morning, then we leave, take him to daycare, and then depending on what I have going on, I need to go to work or I go back home and work, and then pick him up every afternoon, and if I can't pick him up... [wife] is able to get up here, she gets to the early bus and she's able to get up to where she can get to daycare by 6, and if everything goes out of whack then I fall off and I go do what I got to do, take care of family.

Nik's wife works in a bank and earns enough money to support the family. Nik has come to terms with this, apart from a bit of a bruised ego in the beginning, and readily admits that he works around his wife's schedule. His attempts not to disturb her in the morning when she's getting ready to head out to work show his attentiveness to his wife's needs. Nik also accepts the fact that he is the one to drop off and pick up his son. In fact, when things go "out of whack" Nik

is the one who drops what he's doing to get his son. He sees his role as being there for his son, which includes keeping his schedule open enough so that he can manage his son's daily routine. He even jokes that there is some gender bending in his household:

Right now I'm more, I'm more the mom, I guess (laughs), because my work, you know, I work when I work and if something comes up, you know, we know we're going somewhere, she's taking off a week's vacation from work and we know we're going somewhere and something comes up for me or somebody asks, I can always turn the job down. My job's easier too, so I'm the floater kind. If the child's sick, she can't miss time at work, I can always pick him up, most of the time.

In addition to taking care of his son in the morning, Nik spends most afternoons playing with his son and making dinner, the "mom" role. Nik also jokes that his wife has a boss and he's got her as a boss. But Nik seems to have come to a good place in his life. While he used to take every job that came up, he now feels comfortable turning down jobs because of his wife's salary:

We can live off of her salary. We don't like to, and it's tight, but we can live off of her salary. And with me working, it's just a good situation right now. My schedule's so flexible that I don't, you know, before I used to say, I've got to take this job, I'll do anything for the jobs, you know, gung ho business, and I was, you know, if I had to do 3 moving jobs in a day, I would, just do something, just be making the money, and I was controlled by, I was obsessed, but now that's not as important anymore, least for me, it's

not as important for me. I'm happy with myself, I'm content with myself... I know what I can do, I know what I can't do, and I'm happy with myself, and it's become all about us being happy and [son] happy.

Nik schedules jobs so that they fit within the hours his son is at daycare or makes arrangements with his wife to come home early. Because his wife has limited vacation time, the family plans around her and he'll not schedule any work for whatever time period works best for her. Because of this arrangement, he's learned to gain satisfaction from other non-work tasks, particularly caring for and spending time with his son.

Maurice, a married father of three young kids, recently started his own business in which he installs fire alarms, security systems, and camera systems. He was motivated to become self-employed so that he could limit his work hours and days. When he worked in construction, he got paid by the hour and there was a tendency to stretch jobs out to get paid more.

So you know, now it's like, he gives me the whole job, and you get it done. You can get it done in two days, you can get done in two weeks... It's like this past week I finished the two jobs I had, and I've been outta work since Thursday. And I'll go back Monday. And you know, work Monday and probably through Thursday, the end of next week. I just do so much better on my own... And it's just a matter of just doing it, you know, once you've done it, you go home. You get so much done in the day, you go home. You spend

time with your family.

Maurice enjoys having control over his time, a family-friendly benefit of self-employment.¹³

Since he gets paid by the job rather than by the hour, he can now make more money in less time.

Instead of stretching out work or falling under someone else's rules, he can focus on what he needs to do and get it done. Maurice limits his work week to four days: "If it can't get done—to me if it can't get done before Thursday, then you done something wrong and it'll be there on Monday. It'll be there on Monday." He is also clear about planning his schedule to the hour:

It's like I said, plan your work, work your plan. I know how much time I'm gonna spend on that job today. I know what I wanna get accomplished, I know when I want to the thing to end, so you know. Granted, I could probably stay there Monday and Tuesday, like two long eight-hour days and get it all done but you know, I want to take the kids, I wanna stay at home with them.

Maurice has tailored his work around his children. While he doesn't drag out jobs, he also is mindful of how long his work day is. With two children in elementary school and one in preschool, he likes to have time to take them to school, visit their classrooms on occasion, and hang out with them most afternoons.

SEAN’S STORY – FLEXIBLE WORKING

Sean may be the poster father for flexible working arrangements. He and his wife are both government lawyers. They met in law school and she was the first to acquire a job in the state office where they currently work. After a bit of persuasion, Sean saw that working for the state might be the best option for a lawyer to work a regular 9 to 5 schedule. In fact, Sean has taken full advantage of the flexible working options. Now with three children under six, he uses three flex options. First, both he and his wife recently went to a part-time schedule. They each work 30 hours over three and a half days. Second, he and his wife each work one day from home. While they used this option in the past it has become integral to their work-family arrangement with three young children. Third, he switched his schedule so that he goes in early (6 am) and gets off early (2 pm) so that he can work around his kids’ schedule. These options allow Sean to structure his work time rather than having a set schedule determined by his employer.¹⁴

Here is a chart of their schedule:

Table 6.1: Sean’s work schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Him	Off	Work	Works at home	Work	Work (6-10)

Her	Work	Off	Work	Works at home	Work (10-2)
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At the same time they manage three children's schedules. Their oldest son goes to kindergarten from 8:30 to 11:30, their middle son goes to daycare from 8:30 to 2:30, and their baby stays home. Sean walked me through his week:

Mondays I'm off and my wife has a similar schedule, but she's off on Tuesdays. So Mondays she goes to work. And on that day I'll have all three kids in the morning and then I'll take all three kids to kindergarten, drop off the oldest at kindergarten, then I'll take the middle kid to day care and then I'll have the baby with me, and then at 11:30 I'll pick up my eldest and we'll hang out for a few hours and then my wife will get home around 3, picking up the middle kid from day care. So that's my Monday, and I don't have to work at all, although I'm finding with telecommuting on Wednesdays I'm not able to get all my hours in, so I'm working a little bit on Mondays, in between the baby's taking a nap and everything... then on Tuesday I get up at 5 and leave the house at 5:30 and get to work at 6 and work until 2, pick up my little kid on the way home and then everyone else is home and we just hang out. Wednesdays are a little more tricky because I work at home, so Wednesday we're having a sitter and she's coming at a quarter to 8

and she's going to watch the baby, and I'm going to take my oldest to kindergarten, and my middle kid to day care and then she's going to be there until 2 and what I'll do is I'll go to a coffee shop with my lap top, and work from there, then I'll pick up my son from kindergarten at 11:30 and what we've been doing, what we did is once we'll come home, he's old enough now that if I give him an art project or drawing or reading, for probably about an hour and a half, he could be fine. We'll go into my room sometime, we'll tell the baby sitter we won't let the baby know, because once I get home, he'll want me, and we'll hang out and I'll work a bit, and then my wife comes home at 3 and she'll watch the kids while I finish up working. And then on Thursday I go into the office with that same Tuesday schedule and on Friday I only have to work 4 hours to make it 30. And what I do on Friday is I work from 6 to 10, then my wife has taken the kids to school, has the baby, drives into work, meets me out front, we gotta get the baby out of the car, I drive home she takes my car which is then home, I get home about 10:30 and I pick up my oldest from kindergarten, hang out with him, and then my wife picks up the middle one from day care.

It is a complex schedule and timing is quite important. For example, when Sean goes into the office he works through lunch time, eating at his desk, so that he can leave at 2 to pick up his middle son from daycare. At this point, he and his wife only pay for daycare until 2:30 so the schedule is "incredibly tight." But it does allow Sean and his wife to juggle their work and family

responsibilities while emphasizing caring for their children, including “rigidly scheduled family responsibilities” such as picking up children and preparing dinner.¹⁵ Because they each have one full day off, they each work from home one day, and they split a half day of work, someone is always home.

Things have worked quite smoothly at Sean’s office with the exception of his immediate supervisor, whom Sean describes as “kinda more old school.” Sean says that his supervisor discouraged him from going part-time, and he speculates that his supervisor, who has a stay-at-home wife, couldn’t understand Sean’s desire to change his work schedule. Yet flexible work options are quite common among his female colleagues.

Every woman, younger woman, who has had kids in my office have all come back and worked $\frac{3}{4}$ time, every single one of them. So when I asked, well I did not have to ask him, I told him. But there’s someone above him that makes that call, a female, I was prepared to have a fight on my hands, because he says he wasn’t sure if I was going to be able to, and we both found out, she says ‘oh sure no problem.’ So then I had all these reasons lined up and I probably would have sued them through my union if they wouldn’t have let me, but fortunately I didn’t have to do that.

While he found little resistance in the end, Sean acknowledges that prioritizing family could delay his career advancement and affect how his male colleagues view him:

If I'm branded as a bad worker because I'm doing too much with my family, fine, I'm not going to get fired for it; I'm a lawyer, I have an obligation to court and I make all my deadlines, I'm going to do a good job, but the family is higher on the priorities right now, I think it's very well documented and well aware in my office and some people that are my age have said, 'well what if you never make 4', and I say 'well I hope I do, I think I deserve,' but you know I have to do what I have to do, not what I want to do . I think I'm a little atypical from the people that I work with, the men that I work with, but I think it's well worth it. My kids are going to grow up having me be there for a lot of important stuff, and I volunteer periodically at kindergarten to help with the kids, and go to all the field trips, I'll be the dad that will take them and stuff, taking them is something I like doing.

He knows other dads outside his workplace also talk about him. He says some friends call him Mr. Mom and his father thinks he does too many things his wife should be doing, but he doesn't care. He enjoys the reputation. Sean epitomizes the superdad. He works around his kids' schedule. Sean has plans to go back to work full-time in a couple of years. By that time, his middle child will also be in school and he'll plan on working the early schedule so he can pick both older sons up from school.

Other fathers reduced their work hours significantly, though perhaps not under the label

of part-time work. Vincent, a veterinarian, switched from working in a day practice to working in an emergency practice a couple of hours from his home. While his schedule is not ideal, it allows him to spend more time with his family while making more money than he had in the day practice. Vincent views his choice as a trade-off:

I don't like being that far away from home on a regular basis, but it's a choice. I can do day practice... But that usually involves being gone every Saturday, and especially when the kids were young, it's a lot harder to be gone during the day all the time, and this allows me to be gone for two to four days in a row, but it allows me to be home for long stretches, it allows me to be more present.

Vincent's schedule over a month is to work two days, four days, two days, and then have off a week. On a typical two-day week, he'll drive to the animal hospital in the afternoon, work the night shift, sleep there during the next day, work another night shift, and then drive home. This means that he only really misses one full day as he's home most of the day he leaves and most of the day he returns. The four-day work week is the hardest, but in any given month he has a full week off and two other weeks in which he's home five or six days. When calculated over a month, it is the equivalent of working 24 hours a week. This trade-off allows Vincent to work long shifts a few days a month in order to have more time for his family on other days.¹⁶ Vincent has been unable to find comparable work in his own town, and the emergency night shift pays so

much he's able to work a fraction of the days he would work in a day practice in town. It also allows his wife to continue working part-time, which has kept his family together. Before he took the job as an emergency veterinarian, his wife worked "all the time" and they wound up separating for a few months. Similar to Luis, Vincent wants his wife to spend as much time as possible with their children, and he holds himself accountable as well. While he may be gone for up to four days for work, he is home the rest of the time and he prides himself on being an involved father.

Cliff, a pilot, changed his schedule so he would avoid being gone for several days in a row and could spend more time at home:

I used to fly 3 four-day trips – 12 days. And I liked that; you'd go out and fly hard for four days and come home and work 12 days a month and you're off for the rest. But for 4 full days, you leave at 6 in the morning and then get back about 10:00 on the fourth day; that's too long, so I don't do that anymore, you know, you miss too much... it just doesn't work well with kids to be gone four full days a week.

His current schedule guarantees him 11 days off each month. The rest of the days he's on call but he often gets to stay home for long stretches, and even during busy months he works less than when he worked the three four-day trips, which is effectively like part-time work. This change in schedule means less pay but allows him "a significant amount of time at home, sometimes an

enormous amount of time I get off.” He gets to spend lots of time, whole days, with his children under this schedule. All these fathers are quite intentional in choosing a work schedule that allows them to be active in caring for their children.¹⁷

One thing these fathers all have in common is that they hold professional occupations – lawyer, veterinarian, pilot. As indicated above, fathers with higher status positions tend to have greater access to family-friendly policies including flexible scheduling.¹⁸ Middle class fathers also engage in more public activities with their children, which is particularly evident in their presence at formal events and involvement in children’s school, something Sean, Vincent, and Cliff all take pride in.¹⁹

SETH’S STORY – SHIFT WORK

Seth works as a security officer in a department store warehouse. He is a sweet man. There’s no other way to put it. He held a smile throughout our interview and laughed frequently. I really enjoyed our conversation as he reminisced about meeting his wife on her front porch and serenading her with a song he had learned when he was three. They’ve been together since that moment 20 years ago, and he still likes to surprise her by asking her out on a date every once in awhile. He sees the bright side to everything. He talked about struggling financially, living with various parents or in a mobile home, both he and his wife being unemployed at times, and scraping together to pay the bills and buy groceries, but he still had such a positive outlook,

emphasizing how fortunate he was to have such a great wife and son. He also really likes his current job because of his schedule and his co-workers, being able to joke around with them. And one thing was clear – Seth lives his life for his family. His decisions about work have been made in an effort to coordinate schedules with his wife so they can take care of their son. When his son was first born, his wife only took two weeks off work, mainly because she was forced to slow down after her caesarian section. Seth had been unemployed and was using a government grant to go to school. So when his wife went back to work on the third shift, they were able to cover child care themselves:

So by the time I went to school at 8, she would come home and watch him for a little bit and then whenever I would get out of college about 12 or so, I'd come home and she'd sleep a couple hours and you know... So we kind of basically watched after him best we could. We didn't really have much day care. Had a woman that lived in the mobile home park right there close to us watched him every now and then, but it wasn't very often.

Seth and his wife were living with his father at the time but didn't want to rely on him to watch their newborn as he was gone so often. Along with their tough economic situation, they had to rely almost entirely on themselves. Seth took the third shift job he has now in order to work around his wife's changing schedule, although his wife has recently become unemployed. Now he works Friday from 4 am to 12 pm, and Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday from 12 am

to 8 am. He really likes his schedule, which he says “creates” an extra day:

When I get off of work Tuesday morning at 8:00 I come home, take a nap, I’ve done got paid for Tuesday. So it’s like me having an eight-day pay, eight-day week, because when I get up, I still got all day Tuesday left. And then I get Wednesday and Thursday and then I come back in on Friday at 4 am. So it’s like we have an eight-day week, which I like.

Like many other low-income fathers, Seth works a different shift than his wife and takes on a considerable share of child care duties.²⁰ He enjoys being at home during the day, especially being there for his son:

Usually when I come home, I go to bed and I get up and my wife goes and gets him and brings him home or whatever and you know, by the time he comes home, I’m usually getting up about then. So he knows I’m there just about all the time. I’m there for him for anything he needs, you know.

Once his son gets home, the routine is for him to make his son a snack, monitor him while he does homework, watch a little TV together, and play outside together. As previous studies have shown, working class fathers may not be as publicly visible as middle class fathers, but they often arrange their work schedules in a way that creates extended periods of time with their

children.²¹ While this allows for extended periods of time together, their lack of financial resources often mean this time is spent in home-based activities.²² He feels that the third shift allows him to spend maximum time with his son and so he feels strongly about not changing his shift. Below is an exchange we had about his desire to keep his schedule:

R: I needed to be on a certain shift so I could work around being with him and then at another point I had to change around, that's the reason I'm on third shift now, because I had you know, I had to work out what I could so I could be with him while [wife] was at school. And now with being on third shift, she's wanting me to get back on second. And I'm like, un uh. No. I like my third. I like the way everything's working out right now. It's just fine the way it is. I got no problem with it.

I: So why does it work so well?

R: I mean because while he's at school, I'm asleep. I got no problem with it... And by the time he comes home, you know, I'm well-rested. I can play with him. Everything's just hunky-dory.

I: So and if you went to second shift it would—

R: If it went to second shift I would have to be at work at 4:00, I would have to leave by 3. I would never see my son. That ain't gonna happen. And I can't get the first shift [laughs]. First shift I would work from 8 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. Which

means I would be coming home about the time he's getting home from school. And then I would be tired and just I wouldn't like it. I like it just the way it is.

Seth is very happy with his job and his schedule. He might be hesitant to change things because he's found just the right combination. In the past, he's had various jobs: cleaning, festival work, car sales, a couple of factory jobs, and other security jobs. When he lost one of his factory jobs because the company moved overseas he got a grant to pay for college. At that time, his wife was working a third shift job (from 7 at night to 7 in the morning) so when she got home in the morning he'd head off to school. He'd come home around noon and let her sleep while he took care of their son. He says, "we kind of basically watched after him best we could. We didn't really have much day care." All this shows a pattern of coordinating around their son. He has always been around for his son and thinks that's the way it should be. After going to college for data entry, he couldn't find a job in that area and wound up back in security. He's not particular: "if it's a job, I'll work it." So he views work as a way to pay bills and actively arranges things around his family. For fathers like Seth, commitment to family comes before any vision of ideal work characteristics or individual autonomy.²³

Several other fathers work second or third shift in order to coordinate child care with their wives. Most of these fathers are blue collar workers and choose shift work because it helps reduce or eliminate daycare costs and allows them to spend more time with their children.²⁴ This usually involves coordinating schedules with one's partner. For example, Tyler, an electronic

technician, and his wife have always worked different shifts to minimize childcare issues. With their first child, he worked second shift and she worked first shift, while with their second child, he worked second shift and she worked third shift:

[With first son] I was there with him in the morning and then I'd take him down to my grandmother's house. And I had to be at work at two or three. Then she'd keep him until my wife, I think my wife got off at three. So he was just down there an hour.

[With second son] I'm thinking she was on third shift so she'd get up in the morning and I was with the baby. You know, I'd get up early in the morning... she'd get home at seven and making breakfast. Then I'd get up with him and you know, take care of him. And then by, sometime, well she'd be awake by the time I get ready to go to work I believe. Or sometimes I would take him down my grandmother's house. Then when she got up she would go get him and take a nap or whatever at my grandmother's house. And you know, it worked out pretty good.

Other studies have found that fathers spend more time with their children and take on more child care responsibilities when their wives work at night.²⁵ By arranging different shifts, Tyler and his wife were able to take care of their children most of the time, and then they used his grandmother

for smaller amounts of time when shifts overlapped or the need arose. Working mainly second shift, Tyler was able to care for his children in the mornings and early afternoon. He was also laid off and out of work for about 18 months at one point. During this time, he took his sons to school, picked them up, and spent lots of time with them. He also cooked and took care of things at home. Fathers who work second or third shift and whose wives work first shift are often responsible for daytime tasks such as the ones Tyler described doing, and couples who work different shifts share household tasks more equitably than those who work the same shift.²⁶

Tyler's high degree of involvement in household and child care tasks led his wife to want him to stay home. When he quit his current job recently, she didn't want him to go back to work. Meanwhile, she has worked throughout their marriage except for short breaks when each son was born, and they have worked different shifts most of the time. Maurice, the fire/alarm system installer, also adjusted his schedule to limit childcare. With his first child, his wife was working two part-time jobs and he was working full-time so his aunt watched their baby, but then he switched to the third shift so he could watch the baby in the morning and then switch off with his wife.

Darryl, an administrative assistant who has worked various jobs in the past, worked various shifts in order to work around his wife's education and work schedule:

When she started going for RN, then we changed a little bit, because that's one of the reasons that I worked at night to take the kids to school. I would be there when they got

home from school and then I'd go to work, and then as they got older I didn't have to do that anymore... [When our fourth child was born, my wife] worked nights and she was there in the day time and I took care of the kids in the evening... [Then with the youngest] I was working at night so I was there in the daytime with the youngest.

Through five children, he and his wife have worked different shifts and traded off childcare. With their youngest child, he stayed home with her during the day. They tried bringing her to preschool when she was three, but it didn't suit their schedule very well because he was working at night and would bring the older kids to school when he got home and then have his youngest daughter take a nap while he laid down. So by the time he took her to the daycare it was naptime and his daughter didn't want to take a nap since she had just woken up. Because of this, he says, "we pretty much scrapped the whole idea" of daycare and he stayed home with his daughter. He thinks that different jobs and different shifts have worked for him and his family, but now that his kids are a little older he prefers his day shift. He specifically changed jobs to day shift so he could go to his kids' activities in the afternoons:

I tried to get back on days because I didn't want to work nights; I wanted to be there, to be able to go to my kids' activities, they were starting to play the different sports in the evenings and I just wanted to be there and go to the different activities, band concerts and

all that, it was part of my motivating factor to try and find a day job... if I combine lunch and break then I can be off [early] and their activities don't start until after 3:30 or 4 so that gives me enough time to get to the games and track meets or if they need a dental appointment. So that makes it possible for me to do all that.

His current schedule allows him to leave work in time to be there for all his kids' afternoon and evening activities, or to be there for any other needs such as appointments. Darryl provides a good example of how fathers adjust shifts in order to maximize time with their kids. In this way, working class fathers redefine the notion of "good father" in a way that emphasizes daily care and involvement over breadwinning.²⁷

HECTOR'S STORY – WORKING FROM HOME

Hector, a project manager for a technology company, has a thick New York accent and the attitude to go with it. He showed up to our interview in a leather jacket and a cell phone molded to his ear. As he held a couple of side conversations over the phone, I could hear his brusque, no-nonsense business manner. So it made sense when he told me that his daughter describes him as "always the same, always even, no matter what happens." In Hector's case, it is a very calculated demeanor, which he attempts to hold for the sake of his daughter. Hector's wife suffers from depression and so Hector says, "I try to be there so that I can be a buffer." He doesn't want his daughter to be exposed to too much of his wife's negativity so he physically places himself at home as much as possible when his daughter is home: "I worry that you know if my daughter

gets home at 4:00 I need to be home not too much after that, not that I fear for anything physical or anything like that but if my wife's having a bad day it shows and I don't like my daughter witnessing a lot of negative behavior." Although Hector's wife's mental health problems only became serious in the last few years, he notes that his wife was always a bit immature. When they first had their daughter, Hector described himself as the primary parent. While a family friend cared for their daughter during the day, he was the one to get up at night and feed and change the baby. As a result, he and his daughter developed a bond so tight that he is still the go-to parent. And so now Hector continues to take on the primary responsibility for his daughter's care, arranging his work schedule around her schedule. He takes his daughter, a third grader at the time of our interview, to her bus stop almost every morning and picks her up almost every afternoon. In the rare event he can't do it, he says that he has to remind his wife to get up and do it. His wife's illness is the motivating force behind his decision to work from home: "I've had to put her away twice, I've had to sit down with psychiatrists and therapists, major issues, that's one of the reasons I got permission to work from home was because I had to watch my kid, I couldn't depend on her for anything at that point." This allows him to get his daughter ready for school, make her breakfast, pack her lunch, and get her on the school bus. Once his daughter is off, he can decide whether to login from home or drive into work. Working from home also allows Hector to be there for his daughter when school is closed for holidays or teacher workdays. Working from home means that fathers are there for their children in "a more mundane, accessible and flexible way" than working in an office.²⁸

According to the National Study of the Changing Workforce, about one-half of companies permit occasional and one-third permit regular telecommuting in which employees

work from home.²⁹ Fewer employees make use of flex-place than are eligible, about 23 percent of male employees according to the latest numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.³⁰ Nevertheless, studies show that access to flex-place can improve work-family balance.³¹ Hector feels that his workplace is supportive of his efforts to work from home. In fact, working for a computer company means that his workplace is becoming more virtual all the time: “All my managers work from home, everybody’s virtual, there’s no real offices in a lot of places it’s just a virtual office.” Employees have access to all the information they need to do their job and supervisors have access to their workers. This is the direction Hector is hoping to take. At the time we talked, he was applying for a 100 percent virtual position within his company.

CONCLUSION

These superdads are changing the way fathers face work-family challenges. As many fathers do, they claim family as their first priority. However, they go beyond what has become the common situation of “new” dads to directly confront those challenges by making large, sometimes life-altering, changes to their work lives. They have not stumbled onto family-friendly jobs nor have they chosen the path of least resistance. Rather superdads take action to change their careers, jobs, positions, and schedules so that they can be better dads. Their desire to be more involved fathers is the reason and driving force behind their work adjustments. These adjustments are related to type of job and flexibility in work time and place. In this chapter, we saw examples of fathers who quit their jobs, changed careers, changed positions, and became self-employed. All of these fathers sought a better work situation, one that allowed them to care of their children.

Sometimes this meant extreme strategies such as quitting or changing careers, in which case fathers were able to choose more family-friendly careers. Others stayed in the same line of work but changed positions, negotiating a better schedule and often fewer hours. In the case of self-employment, fathers were able to set their own hours, working around their family's schedule. We also saw examples of fathers using flex-time and flex-place to choose their schedule and workplace. There were class differences in scheduling flexibility, with middle class fathers having more control over their start and end times and working class fathers having less control but choosing shift work that would accommodate their wives and children. An important point is that these superdads achieved a better balance between work and family than "new" dads. Other studies have found that fathers who are family-centric, more focused on their family than work, experience less work-family conflict.³² Superdads may be the new "new" dads. Although all superdads are defined in relation to their reason for making, and extent of, work changes, those who are not married face special challenges. In the next chapter, I focus on the special case of single superdads.