

More men opting to become stay-at-home dads ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

When Bryony and Peter Lewicki had their oldest child, Charles, five years ago, it was Peter who spent the majority of time out of work caring for their son.

“When he was 7 months old I went into full-time stay-at-home-dad mode. I was with him non-stop for a year and a bit until I started working freelance,” says Peter.

Now, with Charles in school and his 3-year-old brother Eli at home, Peter keeps his hours at his Toronto-based freelance photography business to part-time, while Bryony works full-time as a freelance editor and writer.

“I get Charles ready for school, pick his clothes out at night. For a lot of the year I’m doing most of the child raising and household chores myself,” says Peter, adding he loves his role and doesn’t regret staying at home.

The Lewickis are just one example of what Queen’s Faculty of Law professor Kathleen Lahey calls the “renegotiation of gender responsibilities” we are seeing in Canadian society as women become increasingly educated and take on more demanding careers.

Today, numbers show North American women are delaying having children, having fewer children and even expressing less interest in having children than men. An Associated Press poll from 2013 reported 80 per cent of men expressed the desire to become fathers, while only 70 per cent of women wanted to become mothers.

“It’s entirely logical men are picking up on women being less eager to jump into the role of parenting and so men are expressing their interest and willingness in becoming parents,” says Lahey.

A recently divorced 38-year-old west coast lawyer (who chose not to share his name for privacy reasons) told me he’s noticed this trend now that he’s dating what he dubs “smart, successful women.”

He’s already the father to a 7-year-old daughter he actively co-parents, but lets his dates know he is interested in having more children.

“A lot of the women I date seem to not have the space in their lives for children,” he says. “I’m a lawyer and I see what it takes for females to get where they are in my field and that’s hard to step away from.”

Lahey echoes this sentiment: “More and more young working women have invested really heavily in good educations and have taken advantage of opportunities that work out well and statistically once women get used to having their own incomes and having control over how their lives unfold, they take that very seriously.”

It’s a sociological trend that’s led to the rise of dad culture, with stay-at-home dads and dad groups. At the early years centre near his family’s home, Peter says he takes his sons to dad groups where he can socialize with other fathers. “They have pancake breakfasts and barbecues they tie in with hikes in the park. It’s just five to 20 guys getting together with their kids,” he says.

Peter says being a stay-at-home dad took him by surprise, but he and Bryony never really had a conversation about who would shoulder the bulk of the child rearing.

“It was just one of those things where it was going to be whose job allowed us to do it,” he says. “Ten years ago when kids weren’t even on the radar for me, I wasn’t thinking of being a stay-at-home dad.”

Lahey thinks it’s “fantastic” that more men are stepping up and expressing the desire to be parents and to participate fully in the work it entails.

She views this as a stepping stone towards more funding for child care and longer parental leave. “This is an important phase because if men learn to care as much about the next generation as women do, there will be more social willingness to share the cost of raising children instead of just leaving it all to play out in women’s lives.”

But for Peter, it’s a lot more simple than that. “It’s just fun. That might seem glib, but the more moments you get with your kids, the better.

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