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In Appreciation of the FTF (Full Time-Father)

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For all of you keeping track of social change on your calendars, you might want to circle November 3.

It is the kick-off for the 12th Annual At-Home Dad's Convention in Kansas City.

There will be break out sessions on what to do when kids go to school, recognizing depression and isolation, building an at-home dad support group and one on anger management.

Boredom? Depression? Isolation? Support? Anger?

Maybe it's time to take a closer look at this whole full time-father (FTF) thing. (Just a note, if you want to get a FTF angry, call him Mr. Mom)

Time Magazine recently did a glowing report on "Fatherhood 2.0" The article says some wonderful things are happening to men: they are more involved with their families than at any time in the last century. They hug more; say "I love you" more and, in general, act more like moms.

It's all good.

But what happens to esteem when dad goes from breadwinner to bread baker? What happens when mom drags herself off the train after a day locked in a boardroom budget showdown and dad wants to talk about how things went on the play date?

Can we simply change gender roles the way we swap cars when one is in for an oil change? I'm not sure it's that easy.

First, how many FTFs are there? The 2002 Census says 189,000. Other say it's more like two millions because the Census strikes many off the list on demographic technicalities - like the "dadpreneurs" who work from home and handle the kids while they're there.

Either way, the numbers aren't huge. With the surge in the number of executive women bringing home big paychecks, you might think there would be more. The low numbers might be a sign that celebrants of the new masculinity might want to turn down the music - at least until we see how things go.

Dads, of course, are still saddled with the masculinity issue. Many shrug off what anybody thinks in return for the rewards of watching the kids grow up. But manliness seems to come up a lot on the new at-home dad web sites that are popping up. They are no longer a curiosity. But mainstream acceptance? Maybe not quite yet.

And then there is mom - at work. I look at growth of stay-at-home dads. And then I look at the Pew Study on working mothers that caused some commotion this summer when it revealed that 60 percent of full-time working mothers would rather be part time. That is up from 48 percent 10 years ago.

Is there a collision of want between dads willing to stay home and mothers yearning to be home? Let's assume we're all working it out individually.

There is emerging evidence - anecdotal but logical - that moms still run the home whether they're there or not. And there can be turf issues.

My husband was between jobs for a number of months and took over the care and chauffeuring of our young daughter. Before long, I was eyeing him the way white corpuscles eye a splinter. Out!

We're past the days when men could handle two TV remotes the way the Earp brothers handled their pistols at the OK Corral - yet be mystified by the three dials on a washing machine. Still they are more likely to apply the five second rule (anything dropped that is not on the floor for more than five seconds is ok to eat), mismatch an occasional school outfit and are secure in the belief that dishes left in a sink for the afternoon do not cause Ebola. There can be a nagging feeling on the part of moms that, in their absence, things might not be running with mom-like precision.

Am I saying that more dads staying home to take care of the kids is a mistake? Not at all. It's wonderful. But I am saying it's not a slam-dunk swap.