

Mr. Mom,

BY BRYAN MULLAN

Tim Pychyl is Mr. Mom.

"To have my three-year-old daughter wake up in the middle of the night and scream 'Daddy!' as opposed to the traditional 'Mommy!' is what's so deeply rewarding," says Pychyl, CTESL/84, MA/86, PhD/95, associate professor in the department of psychology.

Whether it is going to yoga class with his first born, Laurel, or spending mind-numbing hours playing with his six-month-old son Alex, Pychyl is the poster boy for the new Canadian father.

"It's a constant dance," Pychyl says as he holds his son in one hand, and cleans a juice stain off his daughter's chair with the other.

When his daughter was a year-and-a-half, he decided to take unpaid leave for eight months so he could be with his little girl. This deviation from the established cultural script of mother as caregiver and father as breadwinner surprised some of his close friends.

"There were even colleagues in my own department who said, 'What are you doing taking time off and why an unpaid leave? That's the mother's job.'"

His wife Beth Rohr, MA/97, has a great job with the federal government so the transition to "Mr. Mom" and "Mrs. Dad" made sense.

"With each new generation, parenting roles are changing," says Andrea Doucet, MA/86, professor in the department of sociology and anthropology, and the award-winning author of the book *Do Men Mother?*. Doucet spent four years interviewing fathers as primary caregivers. She is now interviewing mothers who are primary breadwinners and writing a book focused on women's perspectives on juggling care and breadwinning.

According to the most recent Statistics Canada information available, the wife is the primary breadwinner in 30 per cent of Canadian families—25 years ago that figure hovered around 18 per cent.

And as more and more moms take on the role of bringing home the bacon, more and more dads are at home cooking it. In 1976, two per cent of single-income families had a stay-at-home father. In 2005 that figure was at 12 per cent—a six-fold increase.

Doucet says as more and more mothers take on the role of primary breadwinner, many stay-at-home fathers are working flexibly, part time or re-training for a new job so they can be home based—all strategies that were traditionally a woman's domain.

"This continued shifting of roles is exciting to follow



Photos: Luther Caverly

Tim Pychyl (pictured with Laurel and Alex), associate professor in the department of psychology, is the poster boy for the new Canadian father. He took an unpaid leave to be with his daughter, surprising some of his close friends.

Mrs. Dad

because it means that gender is not so determinant in the choices that women and men make about work-family balance," explains Doucet. "There is still a strong gendering of these spheres but it is lessening, in my view, with each passing year."

But even though an increasing number of men are embarking on a full-time foray into the estrogen-filled world of diaper changing and play groups they are still a distinct minority. And, according to Pychyl, gaining acceptance in the wider community sometimes isn't so easy.

"When I go to yoga with my daughter, I'm left out of conversations because I don't fit in the same way. I have to really make an effort, and even then you can see the reluctance," says Pychyl. "But slowly and surely the women at the play groups or yoga see I'm doing what they're doing which is parenting."

Doucet has interviewed over a hundred stay-at-home dads and this reticence was a recurring theme. "Parenting is a mother-led dance; from the time the child is born, women are expected to be the primary caregiver or guiding the father," says Doucet.

And when the mother is out of the picture, the father as the primary caregiver is viewed differently and even unfairly.

One of the dads Doucet interviewed tells a story of how he went to his daughter's school at the end of the day to see how she did on a test. "All the girls came running over and the teacher came over because she had to see who this strange man was. And the dad said that wouldn't have happened if it was a woman in that scenario."

Doucet says there are times when just having a male body matters. But thanks in part to parents like Pychyl, attitudes are changing.

"Apart from breast feeding there is nothing that I can't do in terms of parenting," insists Pychyl. "The key thing is I have to be just as responsible too. It's not daddy 'babysitting' our kids, we share the responsibility of primary caregiver."

So can men mother? Doucet says when a male does the job it is mothering if necessary, but not necessarily mothering.

"If we call it mothering we miss some of the unique qualities that men bring to parenting," says Doucet. "Overall I have argued in my book that fathers tend to promote independence, autonomy and risk taking more than mothers."

And while a mother and father may raise a child differently, Pychyl says the most important thing is that he and his wife have equal input.

"Our lives constantly intersect, it's not separate lives, it's shared. And we're dancing through all of it." ■



Bryan Mullan, BJ/00, is a senior producer with Global National with Kevin Newman in Ottawa.

Andrea Doucet, professor, department of sociology and anthropology, says parenting roles are changing and more mothers take on the role of primary breadwinner, while more fathers are in the role of stay-at-home parent.