HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES

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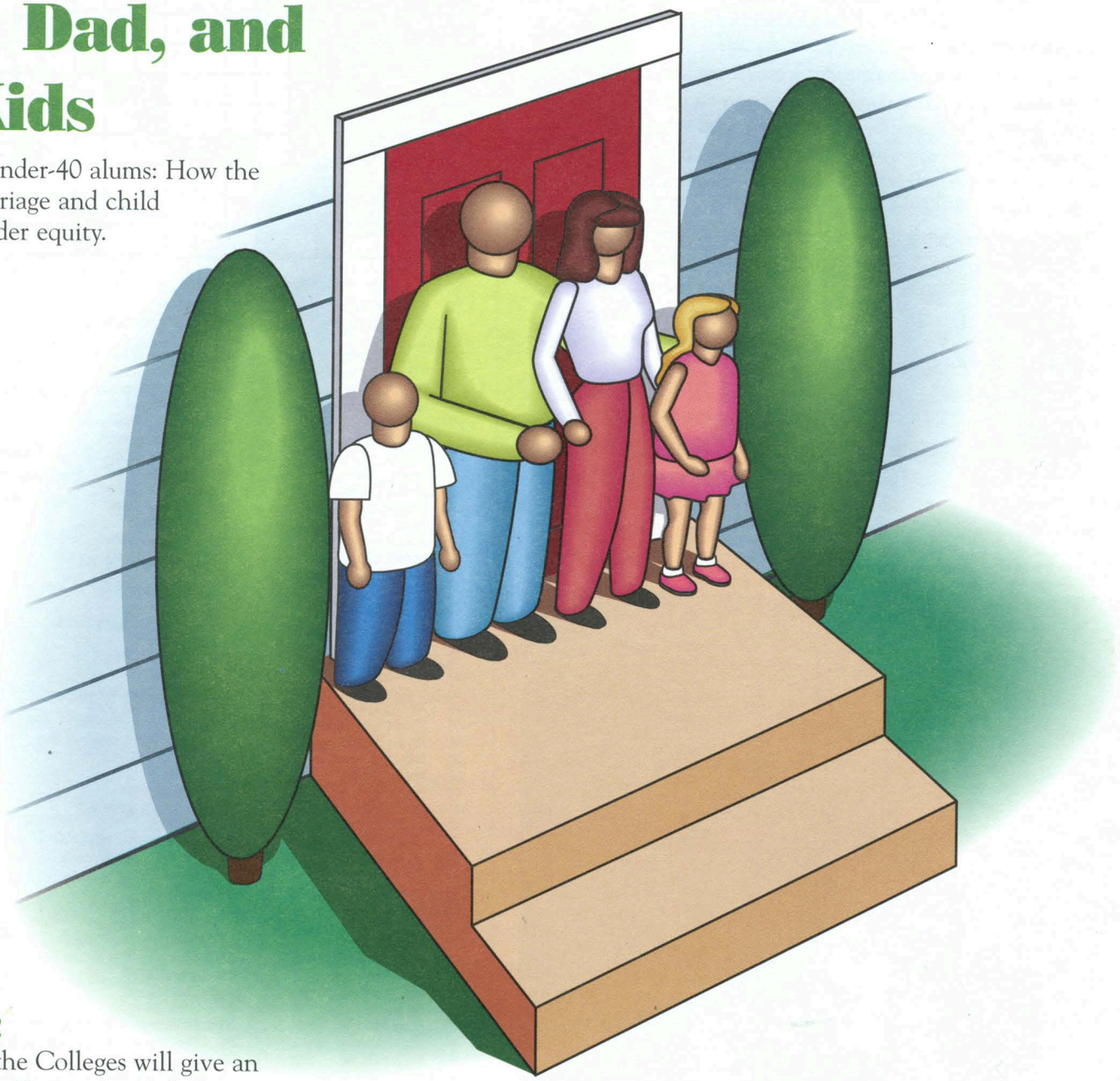
Happily Emeritus
How a few of our favorite former teachers now spend the hours.

THE PULTENEY ST.
SPRING 1998

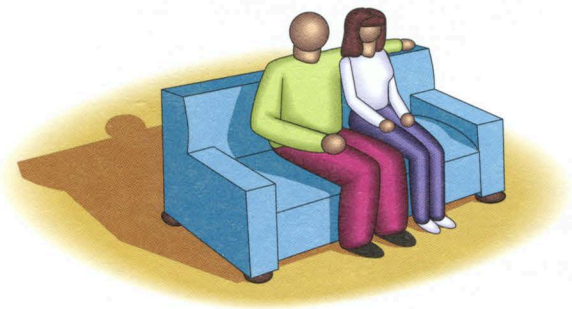
SURVEY

Mom, Dad, and the Kids

Surveying our under-40 alums: How the pressures of marriage and child rearing test gender equity.
See page 2.



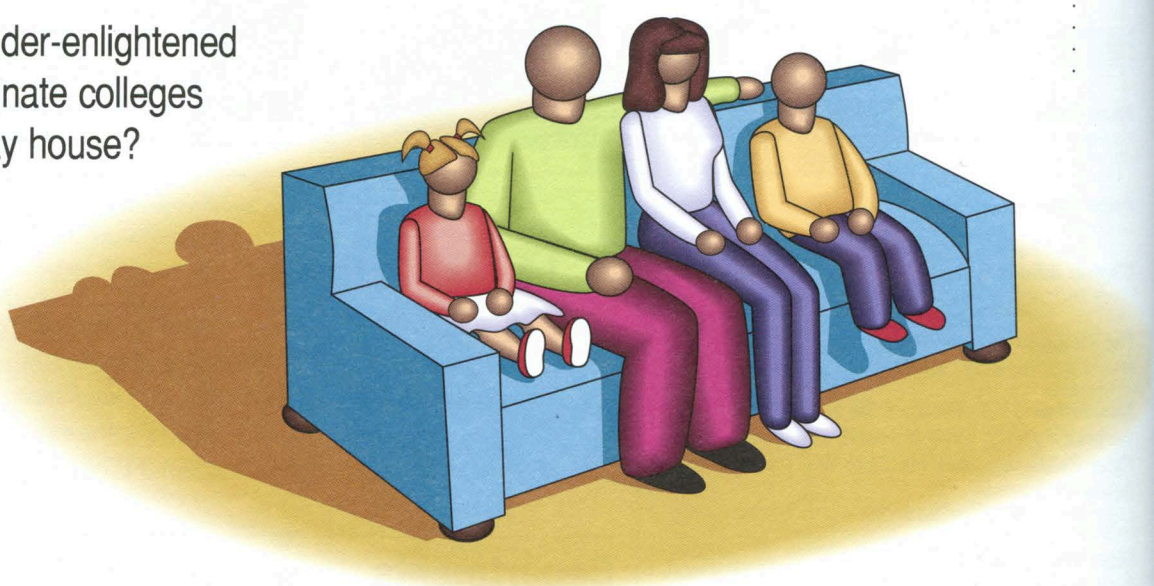
Big Weekend!
On May 15-16, the Colleges will give an Elizabeth Blackwell Award *and* dedicate the Melly Center! *See page 14.*



Married With Children

What happens to the gender-enlightened graduates of these coordinate colleges when it comes time to play house?

By Renee Gearhart Levy



By surveying a large cross-section of the Colleges' young alums, professors Wesley Perkins and Debra DeMeis have gained an array of insights into the shifting values of liberally educated 20- and 30-somethings. While Perkins has conducted a wide-ranging study of religiosity, career, alcohol use, and friendships, his collaboration with DeMeis has focused more specifically on the effect coupling and child-rearing have on gender equity. This article studies that subset of their work.

A note on our methods: Respondents to the researchers' surveys are anonymous. Individuals interviewed for this article were drawn from the same HWS classes targeted by the surveys, but may or may not have been among the respondents.

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Bonnie Johnson-Aten is a mother — to Tyler, 10, and Alex, 8. She's a wife — for 10 years married to Keith Aten, an attorney. She has a job — as diversity equity coordinator for the Burlington, Vermont School District.

And, as a member of the William Smith Class of 1982, she's also a research subject.

Johnson-Aten doesn't think much about being part of a cohort as she lives her daily life, but it's that daily-life stuff that's the grist of study for two Hobart and William Smith professors. Ten years ago, Wesley Perkins began surveying Johnson-Aten and her Hobart and William Smith classmates, along with graduates in the classes of 1979 and 1985, about their life transitions, behaviors, and values. The graduates were surveyed again in 1991 (with the addition of the classes of 1989) and in 1996 (adding the classes of 1993).

The Johnson-Atens. Bonnie '82, with husband Keith and sons Alex (left) and Tyler.

The data from those surveys present unique insights into the lives of young graduates as they make their way in the world, and how those lives — including their daily routines — are changed by aging, marriage, and most of all, children.

Despite attending schools that stress gender equity, where women are considered more feminist in their values than are undergraduate females nationally, most HWS graduates take on traditional, stereotypical gender roles once they are married and have children.

Why? "The traditional patterns are pretty resilient," says Wesley Perkins, who is a professor of sociology. "When children come on the scene, people revert back to what they learned growing up in their own families. Most of the teaching and rhetoric of gender equality in college centers around individual identity and equity in work and pay. There is very little educational and value debate, even today, about gender equality when it comes to parenting."

So what does that mean in real-life terms? For Bonnie Johnson-Aten, a busy day. "I cook. I clean. I coach my kids," she says. She also works outside the home four days a week, while her husband puts in long hours as a lawyer.

"When living individually, or even as partners, this group of men and women had achieved a balance reflecting the new gender equity," says Perkins. But, as the saying goes, kids change everything.

Studying Life Transitions

It was natural that Perkins, an expert in adolescent and young-adult life-course development, would use the HWS student body as a research pool. He began surveying students about their values and well-being shortly after joining the Colleges in 1978.

Household Management

Sarah Helbig Webster '82: "I do things around the house I don't think a lot of moms do."

Sarah Helbig Webster lives in Madison, New Jersey. For 10 years after graduation, she had a lucrative career negotiating and administering contracts, first for General Electric, then for Bolt, Beranck & Newman. Then came son Peter, born on Webster's birthday five years ago.

Webster wanted to go back to work part time, working three days a week. Her company wanted her a minimum of four. She chose to stay home instead, and had another son, Sam, a year later.

Webster's husband, David, works in insurance management in New York City. Before they had kids, Webster says, they both worked a lot and the breakdown of household chores was a pretty even split. Now, she's responsible for the bulk of it.

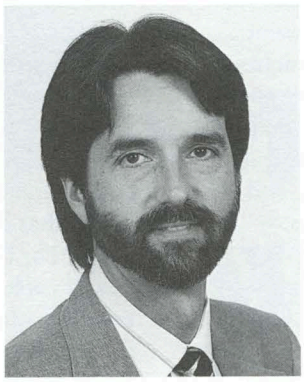
"I do things around the house I don't think a lot of moms do," says Webster. "I mow the lawn, because I love it. We just renovated the house and I did the general contracting." As a former contract negotiator, Webster brings a particular expertise to bear in that role.

Her husband still works long hours, but she says that's typical for the Metropolitan New York area. "When he's home on weekends, he's 100-percent dedicated to the kids," says Webster. "He's really given up a lot to be a dad." ■

Sarah Helbig Webster '82 with sons Sam (on her lap) and Peter, and husband David.

In a few years, he began wondering how their lives change after they graduate. There have been few studies following college classes, in large part because students are highly mobile in the years following graduation and can be difficult to track.

"I had all this research going on *on* campus and thought it would be neat to follow them afterwards," he says. "I saw it as a real research opportunity."



Wesley Perkins

He sent out the first survey in 1987, and received a remarkable 76-percent response (for alum surveys, a 10- to 20-percent response is average), which he attributes to (A) the fact that many graduates had already experienced being surveyed by him and enjoyed his reports back to them, and (B) sheer doggedness. "A lot of it was simply trying to catch them as they moved from one place to another," Perkins says.

After teaching a course with Debra DeMeis, professor of psychology and William Smith dean, Perkins invited her to participate in the second survey, and they have collaborated on the ongoing project ever since. The Post-Collegiate Life Survey is designed with their research interests in mind. Perkins has special interests in religious values and health and well-being, particularly alcohol consumption. DeMeis studies parenting and family orientations.

Their eight-page survey — the only multi-year, multi-class survey of alumni and alumnae values conducted in the United States — provides a wealth of data in a variety of areas. We're providing only a snippet. Call it "Married with Children."

Debra DeMeis

So Who Takes Out the Trash?

According to Perkins and DeMeis, researchers have been nearly unanimous in their conclusion that gender equity has not occurred in the home, despite growing equity in the workplace. What has been less clear is the reason. Is an affinity for housework culturally learned behavior for women, or are women simply reverting to traditional sex roles when they become part of a couple?

To find an answer, Perkins and DeMeis asked graduates how many hours a week they typically devote to household activities, such as grocery shopping, child care, laundry, yard work, and car maintenance. They were also asked how many hours a week they usually devote to their jobs.

If socialization were the culprit, single men and single women would exhibit big differences in behavior. "We found virtually no difference," says Perkins.

What happens when men and women "couple up," either through living together or marriage? Again, no difference.

"The third possibility became, 'Well, what happens when they have children?'"

Supermoms

Maura Clarkin Rogin '85: "I really enjoy my work."

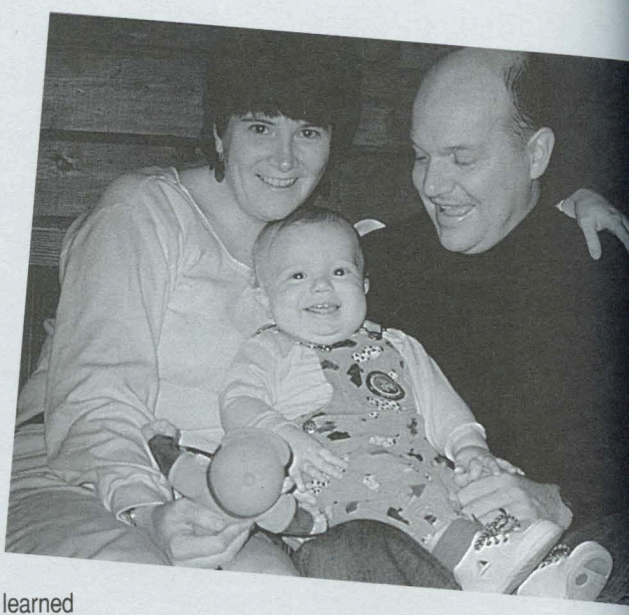
Maura Clarkin Rogin has one child, year-old Benjamin. Before Ben, Rogin worked full time at the Art Institute of Chicago. After a four-month maternity leave, she became museum director at the Winnetka (Illinois) Historical Society, where she works three days a week.

"I went back both for financial reasons and because it's something I like to do," says Rogin. "I really enjoy my work."

As a "working mom," Rogin says she's probably more easy-going about some things than a mother who was home all day. "Ben goes to day care and I know because of the exposure to other kids, he's more likely to get sick," says Rogin. "Whereas someone who's at home might not imagine exposing their kids to that sort of thing, I accept it as the reality of this part-time work. It's not that I care any less, I just accept it."

When she's not working, Rogin feels obligated to focus on her son. "While moms who are at home might say, 'You sit and read your book while I do the dishes,' I tend to put the dishes aside until later on."

Rogin says she and her husband split their household responsibilities fairly evenly. Her husband, Daniel, a college counselor, says she does more, simply because she works less and is at home more than he is. But Rogin concedes she has learned to juggle more roles. "When my husband takes care of Ben, that's it. He's taking care of Ben," she says. "I've learned to take care of Ben, plus be able to do laundry, empty the dishwasher, cook dinner . . ." ■



Maura Clarkin Rogin '85 with son Ben and husband Daniel.

Fathering

Martin '85 and Phyllis Blau Shields '85: "I do tremendously more than my father did as a parent."

Marty Shields teaches high school in Ringwood, New Jersey. His wife, Phyllis, teaches fourth grade.

Marty admits that before their year-old son, Noah, was born, his wife carried at least three-quarters of the household burden. But since Noah, it's more like 50-50.

"Well, 52-48," says Phyllis. "He definitely does a lot more."

"I do tremendously more than my father did as a parent, because my father did next to nothing," says Marty. "I think I do at least as much or more than the average man who has a working wife."

Phyllis believes women have an advantage in parenting because they have a lot more time with their babies when they are first born. The fathers have to go back to work, but the mothers at least have a maternity leave to spend getting to know their child and learning how to care for it. She had a 10-month maternity leave before returning to teaching.

"At some point, parenting becomes a natural instinct," says Phyllis. "Men have to work harder to learn it. I know there were things I kind of had to point out to Marty, and he does them, but I don't know that they came to him as readily because he just didn't have the same time with the baby I did." ■

Phyllis Blau Shields '85 and husband **Martin Shields '85** with their son Noah (and "Sophie").

says Perkins. "That's where the real shift occurs. The real gender difference among our graduates was only when they have children."

"Parenthood is a very gendered role," says DeMeis, "Even more gendered than the role of spouse. The introduction of children is really considered a woman's domain. The new-wave man cooks and cleans and does other things, but isn't necessarily expected to take care of babies."

While women take on greater household responsibility, men sometimes relinquish some of theirs. Perhaps, Perkins says, due to concerns about making money and the responsibility of supporting a family. Mothers who are at home tend to do more at home simply because they are at home and have the time to do it. But mothers working full time outside the home also dramatically increase their household load, commonly known as the "second shift."

Supermoms of the Nineties

If parenting is the major life change these graduates experience, it affects no one more than the women who become mothers. And for women who were raised to believe they'd be active participants in the work force, that's perhaps doubly so.

"The rise of the maternal rate in the workforce is one of the most dramatic changes culturally in the last ten years," says DeMeis, whose research interest is parenthood. "I was really interested in how women make choices about remaining at work or being at home."

"There is an element of choice in this," says DeMeis. "Although many people will say they have no choice, they have to work, you can take two women with the exact same family incomes and one will say 'I have to work because of the money,' and the other will say 'I'm staying home.'"

The HWS cohort was interesting to study in this regard because of its general affluence, leading to a lower employment rate among women. "We have more mothers who are staying at home, and who can afford to stay at home without risking anything. These women can really weigh the pros and cons in a different sort of way."

DeMeis wanted to see whether those choices affected women's' definition of what it means to be a mother. In the survey, she and Perkins asked parents which of 13 activities they'd performed in the last 48 hours, ranging from "monitored your child's diet," to "helped child find lost item." They

were also asked if these behaviors were "typical" of mothers and "typical" of fathers.

Whether employed or at home, the range of activities for mothers was virtually identical. The interpretation of performing these roles, however, was not.

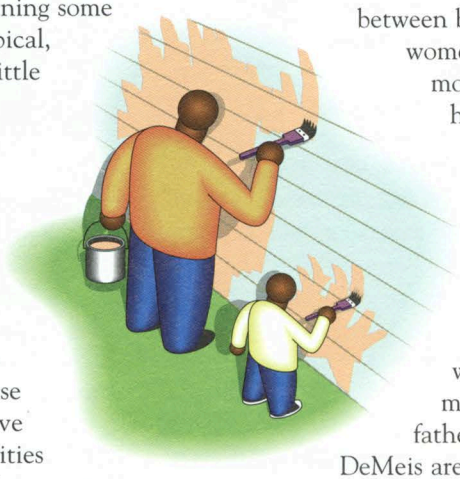
"Mothers who were employed tended to view some of these behaviors as 'less typical,'" says DeMeis. "Our conclusion around this was that, when they go to work, mothers may view their behavior as somewhat extraordinary. By defining some motherhood activities as less typical, they're putting the bar down a little bit lower." So anything they do above that bar will make them feel like they're doing the job adequately.

Interestingly, the flip side of this finding is that stay-at-home mothers expect more of the average mother, raising the bar for themselves. "In comparison with employed mothers, these full-time at-home mothers believe that doing more parenting activities is typical of moms in general. That perception, of course, may reinforce their decision to stay at home," says Perkins.

Whether they are employed or at home, both sets of mothers have some sort of Supermom notion they are working with, says DeMeis. "It's just a question of whether *all* moms are Supermoms or whether *they* are a Supermom."

Pardon me, June. Where are the boys?

So where do fathers fit into all of this?



While there is agreement between both men and women about what mothers do in the home, there is decidedly less consensus about the participation of fathers. Using the same list of 13 activities and whether they were typical of mothers and of fathers, Perkins and DeMeis are currently extrapolating data from the most recent survey to examine perceptions of fatherhood.

One thing is already clear: men tend to view the child-rearing behaviors as more "typical" of fathers than their wives do. "Fathers think fathers do a lot more in regard to parenting than mothers think they do," says Perkins.

Is that perception or reality? Perhaps both.

Perkins says the disparity may be a reflection of the greater heterogeneity of parenting among fathers. Some men do little parenting; others do a lot. But women have to do it no matter what. Parenting for fathers seems more of an option, thus the contradiction.

Or it might be that men and women are looking to a different standard. "If I'm a man, it's probable I'm more involved with child-rearing than my father was, because of generational shifts," says DeMeis. "So if many are doing any of these behaviors, it

Kevin Drummond Sr. '86 (top), coach of the Clarkstown (N.Y.) Soccer Club. Son Buddy is standing third from right; Patrick, kneeling, second from left.

Transitions

Maureen Harrison '85 and Kevin Drummond Sr. '86: "We spend a lot of time just talking to each other."

Hectic pretty much sums up the household of Maureen Harrison '85 and Kevin Drummond Sr. '86, who live with their sons, 11-year-old Buddy and 9-year-old Patrick, in Valley Cottage, New York. Even this interview was conducted by e-mail.

Maureen is co-founder of REACH, Inc., a non-profit agency, and co-director of the REACH Community School in New York City, which serves elementary students whose schooling has suffered from frequent moving and other circumstances associated with low socio-economic status. Monday through Thursday, she leaves her home by 6:15 a.m. for the hour-long commute into Manhattan. On Fridays, she works from home.

Maureen Harrison '85, far right, at the REACH School with visitor, Al Gore.

Kevin, a principal consultant for Price Waterhouse, travels extensively. When he's not on the road, he gets home around 8 p.m. for a family dinner. "It makes for a long day, but it works for us," they say.

The secret to getting so much done in too little time has been outside help. "Household chores are one of the things my friends and I discuss and complain about a lot," says Maureen. "It's also something Kevin and I don't see eye to eye on." The bulk of the work fell to Maureen, she says, both before and after children. So about a year ago she hired a housekeeper who does everything from laundry to cleaning the birdcage. Says Maureen, "She's one of my favorite people." They also have a college-aged babysitter who comes early in the morning to get the kids off to school and picks them up at the end of their school days.

Despite their intense work schedules, Maureen and Kevin make spending time with their children a priority. Maureen is home by 4:30 p.m., in time to take the boys to soccer practice. Kevin helps coach the team and, when he's home, often takes over the nightly bedtime routine. They both try to spend as much time with the kids on weekends as possible.

"When we go out to dinner, it is more typical for the four of us to go together," says Maureen. "We spend a lot of time just talking to each other, which Kevin and I both feel is pretty much the most important thing we can do as parents." ■

Steve '85 and Pam Prichard Skillman '85: "It's so rewarding. You get so much back."

Steve Skillman '85 and his wife, Pam Prichard Skillman '85, live in Cranford, New Jersey, with their three children, who range in age from seven years to 16 months. Before children, Pam worked in portfolio management for a mutual fund company. Steve continues to work in foreign exchange sales at Chase Manhattan Bank.

But Pam is plenty busy, thank you very much. She's actively involved with her children's activities and their schools. "My hunch is when you're a stay-at-home mom, you get involved with more of those kinds of things — helping with the school play, being a homeroom mom, carting the kids to soccer," says Pam. "At least in our town," where she says most of her contemporaries are also home with children.

And there's no question that Pam does most of the household chores, say both Pam and Steve. "Even before kids, I was always sort of the chore person," says Pam. "Maybe before, it was 70-30 and now it's 90-10. My husband used to do his own laundry and he doesn't anymore. But this is how we've divvied things up. Weekends are a different story."

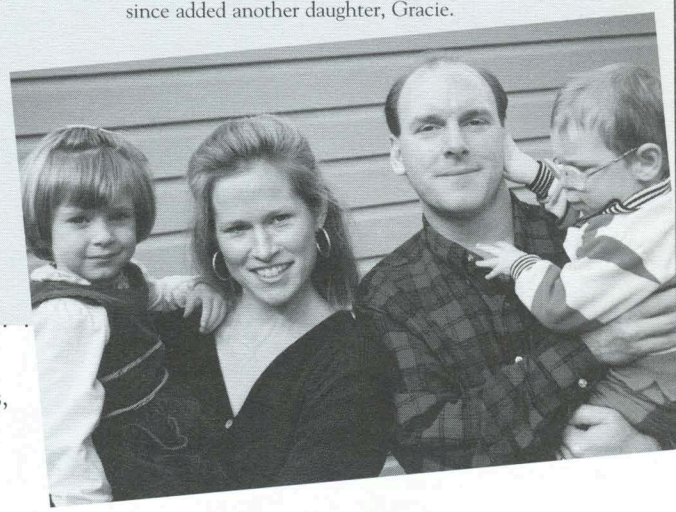
Both parents say Steve is a very involved and devoted father, both by choice and demand. Their special needs family requires a little extra attention — their son is physically handicapped, and their youngest daughter is adopted from Korea.

Steve says he had a good role model; his own father was a very involved parent. "It's so rewarding," he says. "You get so much back."

Steve says part of the reason he is able to be so involved with his kids is because Pam stays home and picks up the slack of whatever needs to be done.

"That makes a big difference," Steve says. "Locally, most of our friends, the wives don't work. That seems to give the fathers more flexibility to spend time with their kids. The Hobart buddies I keep in touch with all have wives who work full time, and life seems to be a bit crazier for them. They might be scrambling just to keep the house in order." ■

Steve '85 and Pam Prichard Skillman '85, with daughter Madeline (left) and son Sam. They have since added another daughter, Gracie.



makes it feel to them that parenting behaviors are typical of men. Women may not be comparing what men do now to what men did a generation ago. They're more likely comparing what their husbands are doing to what they themselves do, so they're more likely to see these behaviors as less typical of fathers."

Employment status also plays a role. "If I'm a mother, chances are my spouse is employed. My spouse's involvement in parenting is going to be somewhat constrained by obligations to employment," say DeMeis. "For fathers, there is more variability. Some have wives who are employed and some have wives who are not employed. But regardless of whether women work out of the home or not, they remain primary care-givers. While they cut back on the hours of housework and childcare, their level of responsibility for those things doesn't change.

"Motherhood remains a relatively stable role. For men, fatherhood is more in flux."

Gender Matters

Perkins believes there is no college whose student base has been studied so fully. While the research presents a picture of fairly traditional gender role patterns, that was not surprising to him and DeMeis.

"I've polled the undergraduate women in my classes and 75 to 80 percent say they'll stay home with their young children. And they do," says DeMeis. "It's not something that comes to them later."

Nonetheless, women are often sensitive when they report their data. "They feel like a value judgement is being made about the choices they've made," says DeMeis. "But it's not about valuing one pattern over another, or about one pattern being better. It's about different ways of enacting the same life goals."

Will the women return to the workforce as their children age? Will they continue to bear the brunt of the childcare responsibility? "If that were the case I would see it as a very traditional life pattern," says DeMeis. But we'll have to wait for future surveys to be sure. ■