

# How do stay-at-home dads seek greater social acceptance?

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In order to avoid the stigma and loss of status posed by their lifestyle choice, stay-at-home fathers are mobilizing to build greater legitimacy for their marginalized gender identity, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Stay-at-home fathers aggressively pursue recognition by and acceptance from mainstream institutions, with a particular emphasis on the mass market and iconic household and family-oriented brands. Accordingly, they vigilantly watch for mass media representations and advertisements that positively acknowledge their collective identity," write authors Gokcen Coskuner-Balli (Chapman University) and Craig J. Thompson (University of Wisconsin, Madison).

What happens when consumers step into roles that are outside of the norm and therefore carry a [social stigma](#)? Men who forgo the traditional breadwinner role to stay at home and become the main caregiver to their children face a loss of status as they invest in domestic skills that are traditionally associated with motherhood and historically undervalued.

Prior research has found that consumers who fall outside of the norm either hide their stigmatic traits or engage in countercultural rebellion against mainstream standards of normalcy and acceptability. However, stay-at-home fathers tend to seek legitimacy by challenging [traditional gender roles](#) and the marketplace.

Stay-at-home fathers utilize a range of market resources from online

forums to yearly conventions and communal gatherings at public venues to forge a sense of collective identity and build social solidarity. Furthermore, they attempt to avoid the feminizing associations conventionally invoked by their full-time commitment to the domestic realm by masculinizing domesticity.

"Through their interactions with the marketplace, stay-at-home [fathers](#) enact a rebel dad persona, and portray themselves as a gender vanguard breaking free from the constraining mandates of breadwinner masculinity and paving the way for other (middle-class) men to enact a more rewarding and socially redeeming model of masculinity and fatherhood," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Gokcen Coskuner-Balli and Craig J. Thompson. "The Status Costs of Subordinate Cultural Capital: At-Home Fathers' Collective Pursuit of Cultural Legitimacy Through Capitalizing Consumption Practices." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2013.

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