

HOUSE HUSBANDS

THE final taboo

Who brings up baby and who brings home the bacon is undergoing a seismic change, but switching traditional roles is not as easy as it should be, finds **Keren Smedley**.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **FRANCES ANDRIJICH**

IN 2014, THE AUSTRALIAN Bureau of Statistics reported that women contribute to the family income in more than 50 per cent of families with dependent children, yet it's still unusual for the man to be the main carer and the woman the primary or sole earner.

There are 4.4 million dependent children in families where only one parent works full-time and in only 3 per cent of cases this is the mother. There are just 144,000 stay-at-home dads and figures show that even if both parents work it is the norm for the mother to earn less and take charge of the home and children, and for Dad to be the main earner.

Choosing to do things differently can often be commonsense, based on circumstances or earning power, but it takes conviction to swap roles.

Nicolle Jenkins, 43, returned to work when her eldest daughter, ▶



Dugald Rodgers has been the primary carer for daughters Hannah (left) and Ava since they were newborns.

HAIR, MAKE-UP AND GROOMING BY GAIL WILTON.
THESE IMAGES HAVE BEEN RETOUCHEE.



Left: Nicolle Jenkins and husband Dugald decided he'd stay at home. Above: Andrew and Nicole Moody both had busy jobs.

Hannah, now eight, was four weeks old, and two weeks after Ava, six, was born. Nicolle runs a communications business in Freemantle, WA, where she and husband Dugald Rodgers, 46, are Directors, but both are clear Nicolle is the boss.

When they met, Dugald was a scuba instructor and later managed a diving store. They decided early on he'd stay at home post-kids because Nicolle could earn more. They both believe it's important for children to have one parent at home when they're young. Dugald has been the primary carer from the start – he did all the night feeds, managed the house, went to baby classes, play dates, everything.

Yet it hasn't been easy for Nicolle at home or at work. "As the owner of a business and a woman with a family, many have questioned my ability to be truly professional. One or two people have implied my children are suffering. But it's made me a better mother and Dugald and I have created a family structure that works for us and plays to our strengths. My proudest moment was when Hannah said, 'I'd like to be a boss just like you'."

In the early days, although he was sometimes invited to mothers' groups, Dugald found that "women don't always know how to relate to a man who isn't their spouse or a relation". This left him feeling isolated at times. He was delighted when another local father began to spend some time as the child carer and they joined forces

with their children. He has always done the company's books and this work has grown as it has become more successful. He now works part-time in the business when his childcare commitments allow.

Nicole and Andrew Moody, both 45, originally followed a more traditional model. Nicole was the General Manager of a media company and Andrew was a manager in a hospitality company. Nicole took maternity leave and then went back to work full-time. Their sons, Tyson, now 14, and Sullivan, 10, went to day care.

Nicole and Andrew, who live in West Leederville, WA, divided the day between them. She left early and he made the family breakfast before dropping the boys off. She picked them up on her way home and Andrew worked late. Nicole fed the boys and put them to bed before going to bed herself. They caught up on chores at the weekend.

Six years ago, it became clear things were awry. One of them had to step down from their busy job and take control of the home. It was an easy decision for them as Nicole was more career-driven and had recently set up her own company. "But I've been challenged by my female peers," she reveals, with some incredulity. "Women need to be kinder to each other and

"Women need to be kinder to each other and not judge others' decisions."

not judge others' decisions." A bonus for Nicole is watching the boys' relationship with their father flourish and to know they're seeing a different role model to the norm.

"I suffered as a young man, as I'd never been taught the skills needed to look after myself, so the first few months away from home were tough," says Andrew. He now encourages both sons to help in the house so they can be better prepared.

Andrew has now found a full-time job with a sympathetic boss who believes men should be involved in their children's care. This has enabled him to be the main carer and work flexibly to meet his sons' needs.

Katja, 40, and James Whincup, 36, are just starting out with baby Anna, who is seven months old. Katja, a GP, moved to Australia from Germany in 2011 to marry engineer James. She's always earned more than him and her career is an important part of her identity. Although able to work in Australia as a registrar, she couldn't practise as a GP. To become fully qualified involved moving to a rural practice in the coastal town of Denmark, WA, for two years. This meant James had to stop working. He's been happy to do this and enrolled in a part-time course online while looking after Anna.

"It's my female friends who have made negative comments, asking if I feel sad I can't spend time with Anna or whether I feel guilty going back to work full-time," says Katja. She feels it's important for her and her husband to take turns being the main earner and, for the moment, that's going to be her. It's early days for James, but he's looking forward to caring for the home and two dogs.

All three couples believe strongly that no one else has the right to judge their choices. Interestingly, all three have always had joint accounts and pooled the family finances, even before they married. Could this be the secret of their success? ■

Andrew Moody's relationship with his sons Sullivan (left) and Tyson has flourished.

