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Submission No: 1683

Date Received:

Secretary:

The greatest inhibitor to fathers "putting in equal parenting" is what is called maternal gatekeeping.

In the type of work I do, I have been in a unique position to observe and listen. I formulated the following scenario many years before I read any research on the subject.

"The birth of the first child many fathers expect to be part of the parenting process only to find that they are pushed away as the mother."

Anne and John bring their first born home from hospital.

John is looking forward to sharing the parenting role with Anne, as he wants to be a great father to their child. John soon finds however that whatever he did it wasn't good enough.

"That's not how you put a nappy on! I'll show you how to do it!"

"That's not how you hold a baby."

Unprepared for the criticism from his wife, John gradually withdraws. In order to fill the void in his life caused by being excluded, he develops other interests.

Year's later Anne when discussing with her girlfriends how horrible men are. She says, "John never showed any interest in the children!"

Sarah M. Allen and Alan J. Hawkins from the BYU Family Studies Center The Brigham Young University Family Studies Center conducted a study into maternal gatekeeping in 1999. "WOMEN MAY BE INHIBITING GREATER FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY WORK"

<http://www.byu.edu/news/releases/archive99/Apr/gatekeeping.htm>

The following are extracts from that study;

"While many mothers in the work force feel they need more support in family work, most don't even realize their actions may be placing obstacles in the way. **They, themselves, may be limiting the amount of their husband's involvement,**" said Sarah Allen, author of the study and recent Brigham Young University graduate student.

Maternal gatekeeping is defined as having three dimensions including the following:

- 1) Mother's reluctance to relinquish responsibility for family matters by setting rigid standards;
- 2) the need for external validation of one's mothering identity; and
- 3) traditional conceptions of family roles.

Included in these dimensions is the various ways wives manage, exclude or choose their husband's levels and types of paternal participation in family work. According to the study, 20 to 25 percent of dual-earner wives may be classified as "gatekeepers." It is also interesting to note that the conceptualized dimensions of maternal gatekeeping tend to be a "package deal"; mothers higher in one dimension, were generally higher in the other two as well.

Standards and Responsibilities

Some women discourage their husband's involvement by redoing tasks, criticizing, creating unbending standards or demeaning his efforts to protect authority in the home. This is most evident when wives act as household managers by organizing, delegating, planning, scheduling and overseeing the work done by husbands in order to maintain responsibility for the day-to-day aspects of family work. Their husbands, then, act as helpers by doing what is requested. But, this pattern may also encourage fathers to wait until they are asked to help and to request explicit directions.

Maternal Identity Confirmation

Rather than issues of control and management, in this dimension of gatekeeping, it is common for a woman's self-identity to be tied to how well she thinks others view her homemaking and nurturing skills. Because of this belief, she is more likely to resist her husband's involvement, as it would diminish her value.

"Generally, men are as involved with their kids as their wives will let them be," says Armin Brott, author of several advice books for fathers and coauthor of the 1999 book "Throwaway Dads: The Myths and Barriers That Keep Men From Being the Fathers They Want to Be."

Differentiated Family Roles

Differentiated family roles refer to roles for mothers and fathers that reflect a clear division of labor and distinct spheres of influence. Here, a mother who thinks family work is primarily for women may be hesitant to encourage paternal involvement and increase the likelihood she will monitor her husband's involvement.

As stated in the study, some women both cherish and resent being the primary caregiver, feel both relieved and displaced with paternal involvement, are both intentional and hesitant about negotiations for more collaborative sharing, and feel guilty and liberated with more involvement from men in family work. This ambivalence about increased paternal involvement serves to keep the gate to the domestic garden periodically swinging open and closed with gusts of wind invisible to fathers.

"This is a very complex subject filled with a variety of gender issues," said Alan Hawkins, second author of the study and director of the BYU Family Studies Center. "While the term has been loosely used in the field, no one has previously investigated its

many dimensions or adequately defined it. With more attention to these issues, perhaps more mothers will be able to achieve greater collaboration with their partners."

The following article supports the findings of the previous study

Daddy Dearest: A Look at Fatherhood

The mama lion at the gate

Maternal chauvinism is a dad's greatest obstacle to parental parity.

By Cathy Young

<http://archive.salon.com/mwt/feature/2000/06/12/gatekeeping>

These are extracts from the article;

Ms. founding editor Suzanne Braun-Levine, author of the new book "Father Courage: What Happens When Men Put Family First," **says that the problem of female "gatekeeping" was an unexpected direction in which her work took her.**

"I kept running up against the fact that the process of men becoming equal partners at home was harder than people expect it to be," she says. "I kept trying to figure out why. There are a lot of answers in the workplace and the culture, but I didn't expect to find so many answers in the family."

Some of these answers can be found in women's behavior. The quasi-mystical "robe of glory" that envelops motherhood, says Braun-Levine, is "one of the perks of the traditional female role -- and while it's a burden, it's also a very nice feeling."

In the 1994 book "Peer Marriage," a fascinating study of egalitarian and near-egalitarian couples, Pepper Schwartz, a sociologist at the University of Washington, reports that a number of the husbands and wives she interviewed came close to full equality, only to pull back once they had children -- **and that for the most part, the resistance to fully shared child rearing came from mothers, not fathers**

It's not that women don't want men to participate; it's just that, quite often, **they want Dad to be the junior partner.** In a 1985 survey, only one in four mothers strongly endorsed 50-50 parenting, while two out of three seemed "threatened" by the idea.

Things may have changed in 15 years; unfortunately, the survey has not been replicated. However, Schwartz believes that the basic pattern is still the same: "There is much more expectation of male involvement," she says, **"but bottom line, women tend to think that's more of an area where they have some superiority and control,** just not as total as it used to be."

These observations are confirmed by some true confessions of maternal chauvinists -- women who admit to feeling secretly thrilled when Dad shows his incompetence and slightly disappointed when he copes well in Mom's absence.

In fact one of my work colleagues admitted that she felt a sense of satisfaction that her husband when he looked after their child was not as competent as herself.

Some mothers wisely keep such feelings to themselves. At worst, they may occasionally sulk when the child displays too marked a preference for Dad. **But in some instances, maternal jealousy can turn ugly and wreak havoc on parents' and children's lives.**

In the 1999 book "Divorced Dads," University of Arizona psychologist Sanford Braver **describes the case of a woman who felt so upset and threatened by her husband's apparently closer bond with their young son (due both to the father's more flexible schedule and to his desire to be a "New Dad") that she filed for divorce and successfully fought for sole custody.** Her husband, who was devastated by these events, felt that "she wanted a court of law to certify that she was indeed the better parent." The result was that instead of being in the care of his father while the mother worked, the boy was now left in day care.

This is an extreme example. Far more commonly, in intact families, mothers may **consciously or unconsciously sabotage paternal involvement in various ways -- by taking the crying baby away from the father, by criticizing the way he puts the toddler to bed or cooks a meal or by directing his every move and making him feel like an assistant rather than a partner.**

"The man who's just trying the waters at being a parent and participating in the household feels very clumsy and unanointed, and then he gets defensive," says Braun-Levine. "We keep giving orders and saying, 'This is the way you do it, and if you can't do it my way, just stand here and hold the dirty clothes.'"

Brott believes that all first-time parents, men or women, have to learn the ropes through trial and error -- except that in most cases the father never gets to do that because the **mother quickly dons the mantle of expertise: "She's not giving him the chance to make the mistakes she's made and go through the learning process."**

It's true, of course; yet one must wonder if, in reaction to a very real history of misogyny, **we are now too afraid to blame women for anything.** In her Yale journal article, Cahn expresses concern that her reasoning may be perceived as anti-female: "If I turn the argument around, and talk about the need for men to relinquish power in the workplace so that women can break through the glass ceiling, I am not making a particularly controversial statement. When I say the same thing about women in the home, however, my statement becomes more problematic."

Because feminists have largely focused on empowering women, they have had trouble making an argument to reduce female power. The results can be paradoxical. Gloria Steinem has often talked about the importance of fathering; she likes to say that "we need to know not only that women can do what men can do but also that men can do what women can do."

Yet in Ms., the magazine she founded and with which she remains closely associated, occasional praise for nurturing dads is overshadowed by screeds against abusive or

negligent fathers. **(Braun-Levine ruefully acknowledges that "we now know more about bad fathers than we do about good fathers.")** And Steinem gave a glowing blurb to Phyllis Chesler's 1986 book "Mothers on Trial," a virulently father-bashing defense of mothers in custody battles.

Indeed, when it comes to child custody, the feminist habit of solidarity with women can turn all too easily into chauvinism. **In a 1992 article proposing that custody disputes be resolved by giving mothers the final say,** University of Chicago law professor Mary Becker belittles men's love for their children and suggests that if mothers don't want fathers to participate equally in child rearing, it's because they know that men are "too indifferent [and] too self-centered."

The function of Maternal Gatekeeping in someways appears to be similar to research conducted by Barbara Leckie from the University of South Australia/Flinders University "Girls, Bullying Behaviours and Peer Relationships: The Double Edged Sword of Exclusion and Rejection"

"Such socially manipulative strategies are also powerful tools often used by girls to protect and maintain their peer relationships and friendship dyads, which in turn reflect exclusivity, intensity and disclosure. These behaviours appear to serve a dual function: to protect existing friendships from the intrusion of others; and to deliberately harm target girls through rejection and isolation." Barbara Leckie

Except in the incidence of Maternal Gatekeeping it is fathers who are excluded, to protect the mother/child dyad.

Very little appears to be done in the way of research into the subject of "Maternal Gatekeeping". There are 2 reasons for this;

Firstly, it is confronting to be faced with research which does not support feminist idealology and research which confronts myths and half truths.

Secondly, as Warren Farrel asserts, "as soon as the research stops showing women as victims the research stops!"