



Conversation Stream Notes

What do Mothers want from Fathers?

Year of the Dad Conference - 12 February 2016

The 'What do mothers want from fathers?' conversation stream consisted of three presentations followed by a floor discussion.

Negotiating the Domestic Contract – how to make your partners an equal partner?

Tina Miller – Professor of Sociology, Oxford Brookes University

Tina Miller is interested in exploring the micro-processes and everydayness of fatherhood and motherhood. Her focus falls on the obstacles to equity and fairness in the domestic sphere.

- Before birth fathers had all the best intentions to 'be there'. However, the reality of having a baby was an over-whelming experience and couples negotiated the domestic contract by 'falling back into gender', assuming traditional roles for parenting and work.
- Challenges to equitable sharing appeared because when men returned to work after their statutory leave, their sharing became task-based: it was organised around their work in condensed 'pockets of time'. But parenting requires a '24/7 thinking responsibly for the baby'. However, when men took on the 24/7 child-caring, then real sharing options happened. Fathers did the same things that mothers were doing apart from one: breastfeeding.
- Mothers then become experts in child-caring because of spending more time with the children. Even though mothers struggled, they felt they had to perpetrate the 'myth of motherhood'. It's important to bear in mind that not all women want to share, since women are socialized from early on into expectations of being the primary carers.
- To improve the complex and historically etched arena of the domestic contract we need to consider: levels of pay, child-care, workplace flexibility, employer support, visibility of male caring, less task-based only father involvement, male initiative in domestic tasks but also asking employers for leave and a societal value of caring.
- A whole range of other shifts need to take place for lasting cultural changes to happen. Especially if we consider caring as a human entitlement not a gendered one.

Men can do it

Gideon Burrows - Author

The author Gideon Burrows thought all men parented equally with their partner by cutting work hours exactly in half and doing weekends on and off, but was angered when he found out they didn't. He also encountered prejudice in how other people perceived him, referring to him as a 'babysitter' rather than a responsible parent. So he wrote a book called 'Men can do it' to give a practical example of equal sharing to fathers.

- In spite of the over-hyped media image of the 'new man', even amongst his friends none of them changed their work schedule once they had a child, but only made use of their statutory leave. He discovered that in a presumed equal society there was a 'cocoon of life' where it was acceptable to behave unequally. Men had more 'wiggle' room in regards to caring, because leave was framed as gender neutral: women asked for it and men didn't.
- It's essential that men take initiative at work to ask for leave entitlement. It's important that men don't give up because if they do, the work doesn't just go away - it usually falls on their partner.
- It's also important to recognize that childcare is hard-work. Child-care is a vocation. And men need not expect a medal for doing childcare.



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<http://www.fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk>

Fathers Network Scotland c/o Melting Pot, 5 Rose Street, Edinburgh EH2 2PR





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What do mothers want?

Liz Meenagh - Women for Independence

Liz Meenagh represents Women for Independence, which is primarily concerned with gender and social equity, for the simple reason that these issues are still of pressing importance.

- The group organises: safe gatherings for women where they can engage in educational debates (eg: change in sex-work laws based on the testimonies of actual sex-workers), 2 food banks and uniform banks, women's aids campaigns for sanitary products, prison reform, justice watch in court situations and media watch of how vulnerable women are represented in society.
- What they share in common with fathers, is that they are part of the usually unrepresented groups in social policy.
- Liz asked the women she represents what do they need from men and they have answered: empathy, respect and recognition for their hard-work at home and in paid work, and the debunking of myths as to what each gender is better at.
- The impact of shared parenting shouldn't be neglected.

Chaired Discussion

Stuart Valentine - Chief Executive, Relationships Scotland

In conclusion from the discussions:

- Better provisions for the support of fathers are needed: to protect men from things such as leave discrimination at work; in accessing father-friendly antenatal classes; and with preventing post-partum depression and handling the conflicts which arise from the work/life imbalance (such as access to the counselling services of Relationships Scotland).
- We need to make sure couple's lives and parenting are structured around choice not on rigid gender roles and the accompanying social expectations that people should just 'fit' into them.



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