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Gender Does Make a Difference in Dentistry.

By Dr. Frank Carter

I was there at the beginning. I was there when our domestic societal family format changed. It seemed to me at the time that overruling the last 240,000,000 years of nature's format might be a mistake. It seemed rather presumptuous at the time, but it was the 60s, and nothing was off limits regarding change. I think it's fair to say that World War II also changed everyone's perspective. Not only was the world recovering from being temporarily held hostage by combating forces, but the terror of such a prospective social upheaval was probably PTSD'ish. In response to the uncertainty over our continued existence as a species, however, a benefit appeared. The technology that the war generated changed the foreseeable future for everyone: socially and economically. There were more opportunities for more people to make more money and do more things..

There is one final component to the aftermath of World War II that I would like to cite. The baby boomer generation became the most educated generation in history. More men were going to college, but more importantly, more women were going to college and becoming educated, competitive, and intellectually skilled. Women had the opportunity to recognize their natural talents and abilities and contribute to society and the economy in a way that was very different from their predecessors. Women were, however, competing in the working world of men rather than the working world of the family. This change in femininity swept the world, albeit slower than here in the Americas, but nevertheless it spread and continues to spread to this day.

While a woman's presence in the upper echelon workplace will continue to be debated by those who have nothing else better to do, the fact that women have been very successful is partly

because it doesn't take any magical ability to be successful in business. Some brains are biologically cut out to run things and make money more efficiently than others. There are men's brains, just like there are women's brains, which understand the velocity of money, the inefficiency of diminishing return on investment, distribution hubs and financial manipulation/management.

But there is a greater societal issue which has been diminished in importance as a result of these modern trends, and I believe a majority of responsible people are concerned about the impact. With the higher assimilation of women into the workplace, the one aspect of domestic life that has suffered is the family unit: the children. In the interest of the children, gender does make a difference.

For 240,000,000 years, males were free to search for food and fight each other in an effort to acquire and maintain resources in order that the family/tribe/pack would survive another winter. In the beginning, the gender roles were quite distinct. The male provided the protein and the safety, while the female nurtured and tended to the needs of the children. With the basic fundamental needs met, thanks to the nurturing mother, and thanks to the persevering father, the children were free to grow into their beautiful biological potential. It is a basic principle of nature that, as long as the children get their needs met, they will unfold naturally like a flower, but this all changed after World War II.

The emphasis in this discussion is on a larger percentage of women opting to go into business in order to make money and foregoing the responsibility of creating, birthing and nurturing the growth of their children. In addition, as part of this independence movement, women sought additional opportunities for individual growth that went beyond the family and beyond the marriage. While men always felt entitled to seek opportunities for individual growth, which was really a respite from the challenging feelings of family and marriage, this was a relatively new trend for women which began over the last 65 years.

That brings us to today: 65 years later. For your consideration, it seems to me that the individual and collective growth formats of men, women and the family have become dictated by the media. The media encourages the pursuit of individual growth at the expense of the family. At

the heart of this dictatorial trend is a simple capitalistic principle: getting your attention in order to separate you from your money. In the modern era, it's not about your children, and it's not about the community, it's not even about democracy and statesmanship that allows democracies to flourish. It's about separating you from your money! The quest for money permeates every level of society today, and it is the children who are suffering.

It is a fair generalization to say that men who go into dentistry are pretty traditional in their intentions. They use their education to elevate their social and economic status in order to acquire the resources, which reflect a level of ego and material accomplishment that brings a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction when in the company of other men. Of course, there are also the men who follow this same path into dentistry, but who are never satisfied with their ego (wife and family) or their accomplishments (career milestones), but that's another article. What I want to talk about are the women in dentistry.

Nature provided women with the greatest responsibility that there is: creation. Nothing exists without females. Males could hunt or work all day long and accumulate tremendous resources and they would still die out. Women are the center of the universe, and I believe we need to get back to that orientation. Just like men have a job to do, women have a job to do, and when everyone does their job, they naturally feel good about themselves, and the children and the future generations benefit. When men and women dilute their efforts, they don't feel as good and the children suffer. Furthermore, women who go into dentistry have even more challenges, and the question should be are the challenges worth it?

Yes, a woman getting an education is a wonderful experience, because education makes us feel safe in the world. And yes, women are supposed to get married in order to have children and raise them to be copies of themselves. And yes, a woman needs girlfriends and alliances in order to socialize with other women and feel understood in the world of business and family, and yes women need to experience feelings of personal growth that comes with participating on the world stage. And then, yes, there is the need to make use of their intellectual abilities, which have expanded greatly thanks to education, and finally, for some women, there is the need to make money. Some women make money because it is fun and rewarding. Some women make

money because they either can't trust a man to provide for them based on their models from childhood, or they feel weak, inadequate and not entitled to be provided for.

This is a broad brush stroke I am painting. While this spectrum of behavior can be applied to men, it's particularly bewildering and damaging when applied to women, because the children are the ones who benefit or suffer from the investment or lack of investment of energy by the women in dentistry. Female dentists I have worked with often find themselves pulled between being recognized as intellectual equals in conversation with men, feeling that their talent and skills in the clinic are commensurate with male colleagues, and enjoying being successful achievers in the realm of making money.

Furthermore, there is the experience of working in an office staffed by other women. The female dental practitioner is often pulled between being the boss and being a girlfriend. While men are accustomed to communicating in a hierarchical manner with other men, women are naturally more respectful of each others' feelings and communicate with a greater sense of equality. Of course, women also have their ways of being competitive and communicating in a hierarchical manner like men. As a result of the power differential, between female dentist/business owner and the staff, there is often friction amongst the women. As a result, the female dentist is often deeply reluctant to make a choice. She can set herself apart from the group, and accept the isolation in return for the recognition as the boss, or she will maintain a secret inner expectation of recognition on the part of the other women in the office for her achievement in a male-dominated business. This recognition is rarely forthcoming, because it is not biologically natural for women to stand alone. Women instinctively form alliances in order to feel safe. Because the female dentist has set herself apart from the other women, thanks to her drive for achievement, the interpersonal competitiveness shows up. Yes, women are/can be very, very competitive. And this is her life outside the home. Imagine what it is like for her when she returns home at the end of the day?

At home, there is the biological (I didn't say traditional) expectation of nurturing behavior. There is the pressure of the husband and the family. The husband, who is either making more money than she does or content to make less money than she does, has needs or makes demands. I will propose that there are two outcomes when the woman returns home. Since 240,000,000 years

of mammalian evolution proposes that men are strong and come and go as they please, these men who make less money than their wives may feel severely limited in their sense of freedom and their ability to measure up with other men. Yes, it's about measuring up to other men. It's not just the dollars and cents. This perceived sense of inadequacy is going to generate an unconscious anxiety or depression, which manifests itself in the communication between husband and wife. How much respect does a woman have when she marries a man who makes less money than she does? If she perceives him as less strong, does she perceive herself as stronger? And if she does, how does this alter the biological perspective that is built into the brain of both men and women.

Very often, the woman who is driven to a postgraduate school education has endured a lot of academic and financial hardship. She has committed a lot of energy to investing in the outside world. Since we are all limited in the amount of energy we possess, it's reasonable to conjecture that her capacity for empathy with the children and her husband will be somewhat/extremely diluted. As a result, and as a necessary part of being in business, she will manifest a difficulty successfully feeling what other people feel, and therefore knowing how to respond effectively to patients, as well as children and husbands. This lack of adequate empathy response leads to ineffective communication skills with her husband, her children, her patients and her girlfriends, if she has any. For the female dentist, these constraints, limitations and pressures can lead to a sense of isolation that becomes more and more problematic as her career unfolds.

I understand that this is a very controversial and debatable premise, but I am trying to reach out to the female dentists in the community. I would like them to understand that their situation brings advantages and disadvantages to women as a group as well as the world and the culture. Women are incredibly powerful and influential on an unconscious, psychological level. Everything in the brain has to be placed in its proper context and category of meaning. That context is going to be a perspective that is very different from the one she grew up with. These pains can be mitigated and the successes accentuated, but she needs a different perspective from the one she received from her mother and father. The mitigation process often involves coming to understand herself as separate from the models of her childhood, and this feels unnatural.

It is particularly important that she consider that the capacity to which children model their parents is always understated in our society. Continuing to believe that she can suffer with stress, anxiety, and generalized behavioral dysfunction and not change the course of her children's lives is unrealistic. You can't hide these feelings. For example, because women have been successful in academics, their emphasis on knowledge has allowed them to experience great financial wealth, but the fact will remain that such a success is not what children want from their mother. They want unconditional acceptance, cookies and milk after school and a story before bedtime. This is an emotional state of functioning that does not coexist very well with a business career. Continuing to believe that lecturing our children makes a difference in the positive outcome of the emotion and developmental growth of the family is misguided. Children don't listen to what we say as parents, they watch us. They watch us, and then they model us when they become adults. Whether it is a good or bad for them doesn't matter, because from a child's point of view, everything that mom and dad do is "the truth."

Thus, the female dentist, just like the female business executive, who is maintaining a compromised life, which is often predicated on using beliefs acquired in childhood to justify the decisions in adulthood, runs a substantial risk as far as her happiness is concerned. Recalibrating those values and beliefs to something that's more natural, more effective, and more invigorating is the challenge for today. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please feel free to look at my website at www.peaks-coaching.com, or call me at 858-454-2828.