

Section 4: Spouses Cleaning Houses

Man's work and woman's work of past decades was differentiated by outside physical labor and housework. Farm work was typically so brutal that men almost collapsed at the end of the day. They were too far removed from the equally grueling work of the woman who did the cooking, ironing, washing, sewing, and child care, to barely even comprehend it.

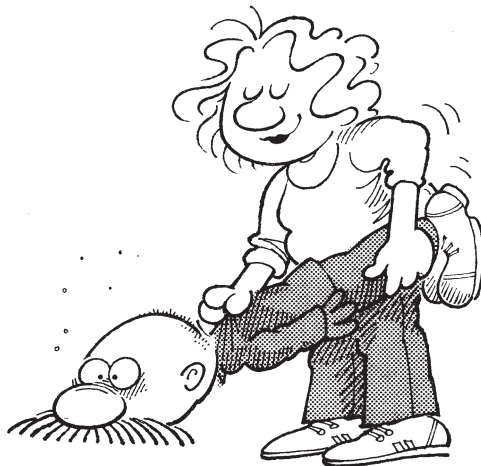
Growing up in the 1950's was a relatively simple time for most young families in the United States. Dad went off to work and mom cleaned and managed the home with 2.5 well-fed children pulling at her skirt. There was one car and a single garage to park it in. Few women were in full-time or even part-time careers because dad brought home enough bacon to feed everybody. With economic and attitudinal changes about women's roles, things began to shift decade by decade.

Although most moms now work outside the home for money, they

remain largely in charge of how everything functions inside their homes. Women in the 21st Century now *have it all*—all the responsibility of home and family, as well as an expectation to contribute economically.

A Woman's Job to do the Cleaning?

So who says it's the woman's job to clean (and be in charge of everything else home related)? History does. Just



because women joined the workforce, they did not shift out of their home duties. Even the word “shift” is telling. Husbands and fathers worked a day or night shift. When the shift was done, their work was done. Women work three 8-hour shifts at home (even if they aren’t present, or are sleeping, they are ultimately in charge), and likely a concurrent “shift” out of the home for a paycheck. Women are expected to keep the house functioning and clean—mostly by themselves. It’s almost a universal cry that women want and expect more help from their spouses. (Although there are a small number of households where a role reversal may be in place, we’re going to make a wild guess that ninety-three percent of the time it’s probably the man who isn’t keeping up with his share of the duties.) Today, the blend of skill, knowledge, endurance, and training has blurred gender lines of the past. Most jobs are gender neutral. There is no chore or duty that is able to recognize the size of the hand upon it. Either sex can do the other genders work. Regardless, it is infinitely more difficult to change people’s basic natures than the corporate handbook.

As authors and professionals in the field of clean living, we have volumes of books, files, research studies, confessional letters, and papers about spouse (particularly the male variety) cooperation and injustices on the home-front. We’ve written our own books and have done hundreds of newspaper, radio, and TV interviews on this very subject! Most of the chatter ends up in trivia talk. Few of the solutions from thousands of experts seem to improve the situation much.

Top traditional remedies and strategies seem to be:

1. Divorce the slacker
2. Have compassion and don’t expect any help—then you’re not disappointed
3. Raise your tolerance level of disorder and dirt
4. Move away from the mess
5. Hire a maid
6. Threaten, nag, or shame them into helping
7. Bribe with money or romantic rewards
8. Hope and pray the mess will be stolen, or go away on its own
9. Go on strike
10. Burn the whole place down

11. Make signs and post honey-do lists everywhere

12. Fake being sick and stay in bed

Most of these solutions aren't solutions at all, just talking points and good fodder for jokes.

Because both men and women are now breadwinners, their time at home is limited and the problem of getting things done by fair assignment is dim. There is an additional complication because Generation "X" parents (and even the first of the "Y's") have been used to being "cleaned up after" themselves,

Most men would rather change a diaper than scrub a bathroom. Scrubbing bathrooms is on "the bottom of the task hierarchy."

—Julie E Brines, sociologist at the University of Washington

which worsens the problem. Added to that, we have created an excessively busy social structure of too much stuff,

bigger homes, more gadgets and gizmos, loads of comfort products, extreme child demands, high debt factor, and,

to be sure, more creative excuses for not cleaning from both genders.

We sense spoken and unspoken dialog similar to this:

1. I had a really hard week at work
– (And you assume I didn't?)
2. I didn't get a degree in plastics manufacturing to do the dishes – (So, did you invent a no-wash dish while you were getting that degree?)
3. You're better at it – (So you obviously need the extra practice, not me!)
4. I wouldn't know where to start – (A simple "yes" would be wonderful.)
5. I'd just botch it up if I did it anyway
– (Anyone who messes up should be smart enough to clean up.)
6. It's my day off – (Tell the diapers that.)



Is it true that men just don't have an aptitude for cleaning? Consider the fact that men own 70% of all the U.S. professional cleaning companies! And more than 50% of their employees are also men. Hmm. Gotta make you wonder what happens to their cleaning capabilities when they step over the threshold of their own homes.

Are they grime blind? *Miami Herald* humor columnist Dave Barry quipped that "Women, for hormonal reasons, can see individual dirt molecules,

whereas men tend to not notice them until they join together into clumps large enough to support commercial agriculture." More accurately, I think some men develop a sudden selective blindness. For these few, all but the television screen is obscured to view, making them not too much more useful than exotic household pets.

Avoid the old yours and mine.

There is yet another percentage of the male gender who is self-righteously

helpful. How do you feel when the macho man of the house says, "Dear, tonight I'm going to do *your* dishes," then "vacuum *your* floor" and "fold *your* laundry." And we reply, "Wow! Is this my birthday or something?"

Excuse me, since when do *moms* have ownership of all the goods and jobs in the home? Do we own the appliances,

dishes, towels and clothing that need upkeep? It would be proper to respond to this spouse, "You mean, you'll help with *the* dishes?

"How do spouses divide up the housework? One of my neighbors works upstairs and her spouse works downstairs. Another lady had hip surgery and finally got her husband to help with the housework. But it took a major thing to get him to help."

—Janet T.

Why, thank you, dear." This is one of several methods to encourage spousal support—and for the right reasons. Here are a few more suggestions that may work for you.

Divide errand running. One super-demanding practice in a mutual relationship is when one spouse deems the other their slave. Sub-consciously they inflict a constant "help me honey" or "fetch" imposition on each other. We've all heard these indirect