



Dear Colleagues,

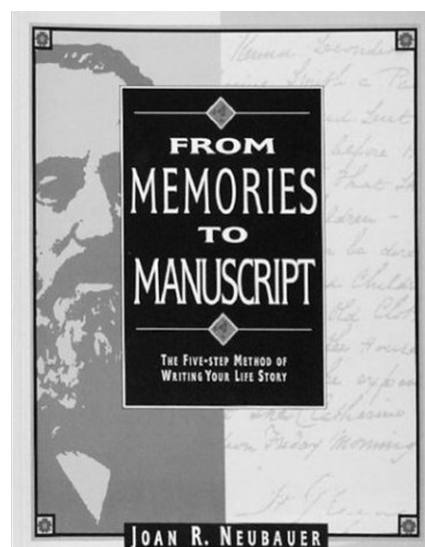
GRANDPARENTS EXCLUDED

A recent study has reported that 42 per cent of grandparents never see their grandchildren again after a family separation or divorce – and 67 per cent can no longer take their grandchildren on outings or provide childcare as they had been doing. As a grandparent myself I feel empathy for both the grandparents and the children in their joint loss.

GIFT OF IDENTITY FOR A CHILD

The report, and a little work I've been doing recently has sparked some thinking in me about how much children can gain from grandparents. What I've been doing is running a 'Write your own Story' group in which group members write their unique memories on different topics and then come back to the group to read what they've written. They are not writing for publication but as a gift to hand on to future

generations – imagine how you would feel today if you were to discover memories written by a great-grandparent! You don't have to be a grandparent to write about your family and your life-story - this kind of record can be particularly important today when children are growing up with the 'virtual reality' of computer games and a diminished sense of identity or rootedness. Don't under-estimate the gift this can be to your family in the future, especially when it's not just a matter of dates of birth and death but of the stories that bring it all alive. If you would like to pursue the idea, you will find many good books on this subject on the internet – you might start with Joan Neubauer's *'From Memories to Manuscript'* £3.65 from Amazon, ISBN 0-916489-56-6



DISQUIET IN VOLUNTARY SECTOR

A number of bodies have approached the Parenting Academy to express disquiet at what they perceive to be a side-effect of its new policies: the gradual exclusion of the voluntary sector and a consequent lessening in the spirit of community development. I have already reflected some of this disquiet in recent Feedback columns, so I was pleased to see the Academy take these concerns seriously and appoint Price Waterhouse Cooper to research the issue. As someone who deals with both voluntary and statutory sectors, I was also happy to be interviewed as part of this research, and I will be interested to see what they report.

IT'S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT

We have recently made some additions to the Homepage on our website. I think you may find it interesting to see some of the differences in emphasis between Family Caring Trust and other parenting bodies, including a shunning of the top-down or 'medical' model, and a greater emphasis on community development and respect for local autonomy. We feel that an up-to-date professional approach has to be combined with this (easily overlooked) respect.

With best wishes,

Michael Quinn

PARENTING FROM PRISON

I delivered a two day course in HMP Doncaster to 7 men. We focused on encouragement, on listening and on talking respectfully (theory and practice). At the final session we looked at how they could maintain and build relationships by telephone, post and visiting days. I had taken in blank cards and envelopes with stickers (cars, princesses, animals and hearts etc) and gel pens, and asked them if they would like to design a card. Well, you could have heard a pin drop as they sat round the table heads down concentrating. The chaplaincy co-ordinator who supports this course said that it has a civilising influence. I am always absolutely bushed by the time the two days are over but I come out with more than what I went in with.

Susan Tym, Hallam Caring Service, Sheffield

CHANGE TO 'TIME-OUT

The updated version of the 0-6 DVD is very welcome, and we are pleased about your editing of the use of the time-out chair as this had caused concern among some professionals who signpost parents to our courses.

Barbara Jones, Parenting Tutor, Adult & Community Learning, Merseyside

BITE-SIZED SESSIONS FOR PARENT/TODDLER GROUP?

We run a parent /carer toddler group in our church and have been listening to quite a few mums who are struggling with parenting. We also run a yearly parenting course, but were

thinking of giving the parents in our toddler group the option of a ten minute slot to have some positive input on parenting. This obviously would not be a parenting course but would hopefully offer some help to hard pressed parents. Would it be workable to use one of your courses in bite-size sessions or do you think there is a better more creative way of doing this?

Dilys Threshie, Tunbridge Wells

Editor: I like what you envisage, Dilys, and I understand that it has already worked for others. You might prepare a short input on any topic. It is also respectful to somehow involve the parents in the first minute or two. For example, you might show the little DVD clip from the 0-6 parenting programme of a parent talking to a visitor the way she talks to her child (it is quite funny, but it makes the point very effectively), and it might help to start simply by asking the parents if "Have ever noticed a difference between how you talk to your children and how you talk to visitors – what are some of the differences...?" That can lead into the clip more effectively, I think. We look



Feedback

forward to hearing how you get on.

TEENAGERS WON'T TAKE PART

I am running a 'parenting teenagers' course and find it very useful – one parent said her blood pressure had dropped enormously since she'd taken it, and most parents felt it had significantly improved some area of their family life. I tried to run the final session including teens as suggested in the course, but they wouldn't come. We then asked them to take part online via a private chat room, and several were happy to do this. Obviously it is their kind of medium and we hope it will be an effective way of showing them the 'listen and check' method and getting them to discuss and practise it online.

Caroline Midmore, Market Research Consultant

cmidmore@lineone.net

Editor: Great. We'll be interested to hear how the project goes.

SOME OF THE RIGHT NOISES

I'm encouraged by the new government white paper, *21st Century Schools*. It's finally making some of the right noises about the importance of parental involvement. At a local level it's also encouraging to see my trainer, Anne Ruane, supervising the training of more people to run your parenting programmes using the OCN Group Leadership Skills Training. This is for our Parenting Project, which is funded by 'Celebrating Family.'

Breda Theakston, Leeds

GENDER AND FAMILY

The next time you see a headline about the glass ceiling that prevents many women from reaching the top, don't automatically assume that the statistics speak for themselves. The reason for the imbalance may be that fewer highly-talented women want to be at the top.

FLAW IN EARLIER FEMINISM

A flaw in early feminist thinking was the assumption that women wanted to be successful in much the same ways as men had become successful: women would never be equal, it was argued, until they took on male roles and forsook aspects of their femininity. It is understandable how this thinking developed, for women's biological differences had been used against them for centuries in denying them a vote, education, access to capital and equal opportunities.

This early feminist thinking is now increasingly being questioned as women assert their own distinctive roles. Psychologist, therapist and author Susan Pinker argues from the research that only 25-30% of women are as driven and competitive as men, social connection means more to them than to men, and they prefer meaningful rather than career-driven work. It can be a mature choice and not necessarily a step backwards for these women to turn their backs on overwork and disrupted family time.

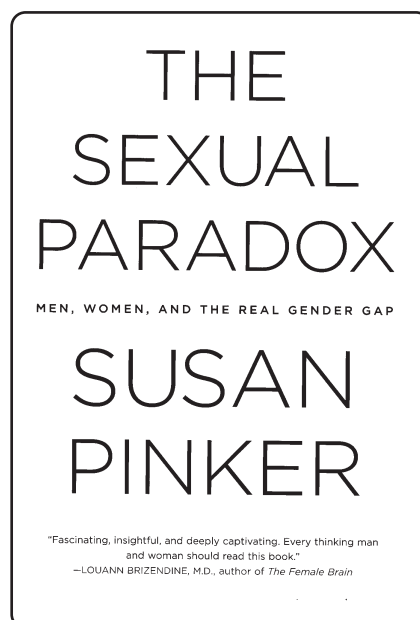
This is not to say that women are operating today on a level

playing field. They are not. There are improvements in their situation, but they continue to lose out: child-care provision for women who want to work, for example, is still inadequate, and women suffer from continued assumptions about them – that they need to follow where their partner's job takes him, etc., etc.

MALE EXTREMES

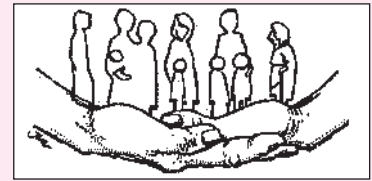
Susan Pinker's book also looks at another reason why males dominate positions of power in the market-place. Many of her clients for therapy were maladjusted boys who might have been expected to fail in adulthood but actually became brilliant when they found their niche. She points to a whole body of research that shows how men exhibit more extreme variability than women, reaching greater heights of brilliance and greater depths of criminality, weakness, etc.

It is a controversial but engaging, well-argued book which certainly highlights some important puzzles and new insights into gender differences.



*Susan Pinker, **The Sexual Paradox: Men, Women and the real Gender Gap.** Amazon £18.95*

A column for those promoting the courses as part of ministry in their own faith tradition



Family Values?

When some faith communities talk about 'family values' they can do a serious disservice to families.

Very often they will quote from their scriptures, pointing to the nuclear family of Mum, Dad and children living in disciplined, hardworking bliss as if this ('Victorian' and untypical) form of family were ordained by God as the only acceptable form.

The sacred scripture of different faiths has important things to say about loving and faithful relationships, but to quote it in order to reinforce a particular pattern of behaviour is to abuse scripture. In Bible times, for example, a 'family' often meant up to sixty or more people. Since then it has gone through many different forms and been judged by widely different theological standards. It would make far more sense, instead of talking about vague family 'values' to talk about family 'virtues' – based on justice and love. This would mean recognising and respecting the uniqueness and sacredness of one's sisters and brothers everywhere. In other words, it might mean allowing ourselves to be challenged by the question Jesus asked: "Who are my mother and my brothers?"



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