

Ending Mom Bias

by [Hogan Hilling](#) and [Tom Konecny](#) (February 2020)



Father's Unpleasant Duties, Adriaen Brouwer, 1631

Harvard scholars have declared inequality as one of America's most vexing social problems and have been exploring the many facets of inequality for decades. One of them is gender inequality.

In a 2016 Harvard article, economist Jeni Klugman, a fellow at the [Women and Public Policy Program](#) and adjunct lecturer with the Harvard Kennedy School stated, "In recent years girls and women globally have made gains in education, and both maternal and child health are on the rise. And yet in other ways, the push toward gender equality has been stymied. Participation in the labor force by women globally is flat or falling."

There is no doubt that the workplace is still a male dominated culture and there remain huge hurdles to overcome before women achieve gender equality, especially at the top. However, the truth is that there is a double standard when it comes to addressing gender inequality—often only regarded as a woman's issue. The notion that it also exists for men is difficult for our culture to accept.

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Whether it is unintentional or merely an oversight, gender inequality exists in the form of *mom bias* in the parenting community. The mom bias is so ingrained into our culture and it begins before the birth of the baby. There is plenty of evidence to prove it exists in a variety of parent related venues such as hospitals, family resource centers, baby

accessory stores, parent teachers association and parenting magazines.

The most significant proof of mom bias is the female dominated staff in each of the aforementioned parent related organizations and businesses. Second is the curriculum, in which the information, resources and support for moms far outnumbers what is available for dads. Third is the lack of respect and value these organizations and businesses give for a dad's perspective. Fourth is that they do not create a father-friendly environment. These same inequities hold true for women in the male dominated workplace.

Hospitals and family resource centers provide a multitude of services and classes that focus on mom but only one class for expectant dads. While hospitals and moms expect dads to learn everything about a mom's perspective, there is no class available for moms that offer them a dad's perspective on becoming a parent. Childbirth instructors also refer to dad as a coach or partner. The reality is that most of the dads who attend the childbirth classes are married and deserve to be referred to as dad. Furthermore, the dominated female childbirth staff has no knowledge of a dad's perspective, which makes it difficult to meet a dad's needs or answer his questions and concerns.

Baby accessory stores, as well as most businesses, openly admit that their marketing strategy is directed solely to moms and have no interest in marketing to dads. This is because businesses still believe moms are the gateway to sales. While their research, which is also mom bias, shows that women make 85% of purchasing decisions in a household, these numbers are open to debate because not only have family dynamics

dramatically changed in the last three decades, the advent of online shopping has changed the way we purchase consumer goods.

A family dynamic that has increased in numbers is the at-home dad population. This is significant because most of these dads gave up or placed their careers on hold in order for their wives' to pursue their professional careers. In so doing, these working moms also strengthen the crusade for gender equality in the workplace.

Other family dynamics include the growth of the two-income and flex-time households, in which dads and moms share in the parenting responsibilities and also with single dads due to the increasing number of divorces.

Baby accessory stores also provide amenities for the moms that they don't provide for dads. For example, there is a "Moms' Room" but not a "Dads' Room." Why not name it a "Parents' Room?" This allows both parents to use the same room because dads also need a place to change a diaper or calm a crying baby.

As companies continue to primarily focus on marketing to moms, they ignore half the parenting population. Therefore, they lose a significant amount of revenue. In our book *DADLY Dollar\$: How Marketing to Dads Will Increase Revenue and Strengthen Families*, we estimate that Babies R Us is losing \$300,000 a day by not marketing to dads. This is a large loss for a company that recently filed for bankruptcy. But more important than the revenue is that companies squander

opportunities to help strengthen a dad's bond with the baby and also strengthen families.

Mom bias is also evident in the Parent Teacher Association. Moms dominate the board positions and have yet to explore or implement other options that would create gender equality in elementary schools.

Why not conduct the PTA meetings at night?

Why not reach out and market to dads who are the primary caregivers, work at night, dads who are firemen with flexible schedules, dads who own their own business and who also have flexible work schedules?

The most compelling proof of mom bias in the PTA is the presentation for the Parent of the Year Award. Most of the time a mom receives the award.

Why exclude dads from the award?

A simple solution is to present the award to a mom and a dad. Dads are also parents and ideally it takes teamwork between a mom and dad to parent a child. Furthermore, over the last three decades dads have been more proactive at elementary schools through the growth of Dads Clubs at elementary schools. Today there are thousands of Dads Clubs. This accomplishment by dads alone should warrant also presenting a dad with the Parent of the Year Award along side a mom.

The mom bias in the parenting magazines is reflected in the advertisement and content. There is a huge disparity between advertisement for dads versus moms as well as the content published about motherhood issues as compared to fatherhood issues. Although parenting magazines have hired dads to write articles, moms dominate the editorial staff. Consequently, dads don't have much of a voice or say in the publishing decision of parenting topics.

The mom bias also exists when it comes to research, especially in the study of parental absence. In the last three decades researchers have spent an enormous amount of time and money studying the effects of father absence but have avoided investing the same amount of attention to study the negative effects of mother absence. The researchers lack to do so raises many questions.

Why do researchers fear evaluating mother absence in the same way it does father absence?

Why is our culture in denial about the fact that mother absence exists?

Why is it so hard to accept that a mom is also capable of neglecting or abandoning a child? Some examples are moms who have been admitted in a drug rehab program, incarcerated or deemed incompetent to care for the children without supervision.

Where are the motherhood organizations who denounce mother absence?

Where are the motherhood organizations who single out the dead-beat moms?

Where are the advertising slogans that challenge moms to reduce the number of absent moms?

Why is it important to openly discuss mother absence?

Why is it important to openly discuss the mom bias in the parenting community?

Why is it important to answer these questions?

Iris Bohnet author of [What Works: Gender Equality by Design](#). Bohnet and Professor of Public Policy, and behavioral economist at Harvard Kennedy School, provides this insight in her book.

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Gender equality is a moral and a business imperative. But

unconscious bias holds us back, and de-biasing people's mind has proven to be difficult and expensive. Diversity training programs have had limited success, and individual effort alone often invites backlash. Behavioral design offers a new solution. By de-biasing organizations instead of individuals, we can make smart changes that have big impacts.

If women are truly sincere about achieving gender equality in the workplace, they must seriously begin a discussion about mom bias and then implement the necessary changes for gender equality in the parenting community. In order to do so, the first big step is for women to fully embrace dads as equal, valued and competent parents.

«[Previous Article](#) [Table of Contents](#) [Next Article](#)»

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