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### **Calgary Herald: Moms and dads are different, and that's a good thing**

Published June 30, 2014

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What can we learn from the manufactured Peter MacKay affair? At a basic level, when Justice Minister Peter MacKay was publicly lambasted for sending a Mother's Day card, in contrast with a different Father's Day card, we learn to retire the Mother's Day cards, cancel the brunches, call off the breakfast in bed.

Noting a mother's work is actually offensive. Ditto on Father's Day; simply no need to laud a man for being a father; this at a time when fathers are so desperately needed.

The new post-sexual norms are entirely lost on the Ontario Bar Association set. Many young women today long for marriage; it is unattainable. They long for children; they get to participate instead in a host of expensive and painful fertility treatments. They've been working, quite successfully, building careers, and it's the family piece that doesn't come together quite so easily. The ideologues who pick apart a perfectly lovely compliment are simply not in tune with the current struggles of many young women.

There are no biological differences between men and women for these ideologues. So steeped are they in a world view that says there is absolutely no difference, that merely mentioning that women are mothers is a no-fly zone.

Associating certain tasks with mothering is a step even more insulting. Where there is no value whatsoever to being a mother — please wind up your small children and have them raise themselves — there can be no value assigned to the tasks of mothering.

Admittedly, elements of mothering can be mundane. Yet the role is not merely changing a diaper, or making a lunch, or cutting up fruit very small. It is instilling character and virtue, teaching love, discipline and wisdom. These things are good things. Anyone, man or woman, boss or friend, minister of Justice or janitor, ought to be able to note them and compliment them.

Furthermore, the reality in 21st century Canada as anywhere else in the world or in history, is that mothers and fathers are different. This reality troubles no one but gender theorists.

True: Married Canadian mothers spend more than twice as many hours each week on parenting and child care as men do. Particularly for young children, this is a good thing. Dads matter from conception, and their involvement during pregnancy and infancy is linked to better outcomes at birth, higher breastfeeding rates, and better health more generally.

Still, the first key attachment a baby forms, the strength and health of which leads to better relationships and mental health lifelong, is usually with one person. That this tends to be the mother is not insulting, it's beautiful.

The message that's too often sent to mothers is that this work is meaningless because it's unpaid, that it would be better delegated to a daycare, and that it's drudgery that should be beneath them while they pursue a career.

Just as a high proportion of Canadian mothers work outside the home, so do most Canadian fathers spend more time parenting than their fathers or grandfathers did. That, however, is only if they are able to live with their children full time. Barely more than half of Canadian children live with their own married parents; when children don't see much of one parent, it's nearly always their father. We're just beginning to pay the societal price of fatherlessness.

Sleeping under the same roof as their father benefits children in ways too many to count, from lowering the chances that they'll drop out of school, use drugs, or be physically or sexually abused, to increasing their long term physical and mental health. But the sitcom stereotype of clueless dads, and of single moms successfully being both mother and father after discarding dad, persists. Praising fathers who bestow wisdom on their children doesn't imply that mothers can't or don't, either.

Recognizing that mothers and fathers bring different qualities to their families isn't deeming one of them more important than the other. Neither is it offensive to acknowledge that the work of mothering often looks very different from the work of fathering.

What really insults our intelligence, not to mention our common sense, is to suggest that there are, and should be, no differences between mothers and fathers, and that they should be as seamlessly interchangeable — and disposable — as modular furniture.

The worst part of all of this is the unnecessary perpetuation of a war between the sexes. When will it end? Men are our fathers, brothers, husbands and friends, and families are not zero-sum games, where one party can only thrive at the expense of another. Whatever your politics, whatever your experience, sniping about mothers and fathers, and those who praise them, simply cannot be what the early feminists fought for.

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