

## The Price of Fatherhood--a Father's Reply to Ann Crittenden's 'Mothers Manifesto'

By Glenn Sacks

*Note: This is the long version of this article.*

Ann Crittenden's popular *The Price of Motherhood: Why Motherhood is the Most Important--And Least Valued--Job in America*, released in paperback this week, has become the first feminist classic of the new millennium. Crittenden's "mothers' manifesto" is an expose of the so-called "mommy tax," which can include reduced job opportunities and salary for mothers, as well as a lack of appreciation, often from working women themselves.

However, if there is a woman paying the "mommy tax" by sacrificing her earning power to be at home full-time or part-time, there has to be a man in the household supporting the family and, by so doing, paying the "daddy tax." Crittenden, by defining "privilege" and "sacrifice" only in terms of pay and career status, sees disadvantages only for mothers and not for fathers. But what about the price of fatherhood?

The average American father works 51 hours a week. While nearly half of American mothers with children under the age of six do not work full time, even those who do average only a 41 hour work week. American men work the longest hours of any workers (male or female) in the industrialized world. Men work 90% of the overtime hours in the US, and are more likely to work nights and weekends, to travel for work, and to have long commutes. All of these deprive fathers of valuable time with their children.

In addition, men do our society's most hazardous and demanding jobs, in large part because the higher pay allows them to better provide for their families. Nearly 100,000 American workers died from job-related injuries over the past decade and a half, 95% of them men. There were over 100 million workplace injuries in the US between 1976 and 1999, again the overwhelming majority of them suffered by men.

Men dominate in all stress-related diseases, including a two to one lead in heart disease. In fact, Gloria Steinem once cited this in advising men to support women's careers, saying, "Men--support feminism! You have nothing to lose but your coronaries!"

Less time with their children, long work days and work weeks, job hazards and job stress--all of these are the daddy tax. I know, because I've paid it. As the main provider for my family, I worked 60 hour, six day weeks far from home, sometimes at hazardous construction jobs. I missed my young son so badly that many times, arriving home from work late at night, I would carry him around the house on my shoulder, even though he was asleep. My fatherhood was the hollow, joyless fatherhood many men endure--all the burdens of supporting children drained of the pleasure of actually being with them. At times it seemed the only interaction I had with my son was disciplining him, the one parenting job which has not so generously always been reserved for fathers.

One day I was so disheartened over the situation that I walked off my job, pulled my son out of his kindergarten class, took him to the toy store, bought him a race car set, and spent the rest of the day playing with him. Fortunately, it didn't cost me my job.

Even more fortunate is that, unlike many men and fathers, I haven't been financially trapped in a hazardous job--what men's advocate Warren Farrell calls the "glass cellar of male disposability." A construction job I worked at when I was young illustrates well the untold cost of fatherhood which many men pay.

I worked at a nuclear power plant in the South. Every morning we strapped on our tool belts and hard hats, and made the long climb up the rebar skeletal frame of the building. Once we were 50 feet up, we hooked our hook belts around the rebar and then leaned back to work, with most of our weight on that hook belt. Leaving aside the blistering heat, the difficult reaches, and the danger of someone else's tools falling on you, the reality was that your life--minute by minute, hour after hour, day after day--was dependent upon that hook belt.

One day a journeyman electrician called to me to climb down and help him. He had a rope in one hand and his tool box in the other. We walked over to a large room filled with immense electrical panels. He told me to stand 10 feet behind him and hold the rope. I had no idea why, but I did as I was told. He then made the other part of the rope into a harness, put it on, and said "I'm gonna work on these wires, and some of them are live. If I hit the wrong one and start to fry, you pull me out."

I thought he was joking.

He wasn't.

He began to work and every once in a while he would take a tool he was done with and throw it at my feet, saying "hey--you awake? I got three kids to feed and they ain't gonna go barefoot 'cause you aren't payin' attention."

"No, no, I'm here," I protested. "Why don't they turn off the power so you can do this without being in danger?"

"Company won't do it. Too expensive."

"More expensive than your life?"

"To them."

"How come you don't just tell them 'no?' "

"Can't. Got kids to feed."

"You could do something else. Go to college."

"No money for it--got kids, a wife, a mortgage. Wait 'till you get married and have kids--you'll see."

Lunch time was often the time for "scare the new guy" on workplace injuries and safety. Every man had a horror story to tell, either about what happened to him or what happened to his buddy. The guy who shot his nailgun into a knot in wood and the nail glanced off and nailed his hand to the wall--just before his ladder came out from under him. The guy who sliced his fingers off with a saw and stepped on one as he tried to pick them up one by one. The guy who repaired power lines and hit a live wire while working 20 feet up and is only alive today because his buddy kicked him off the pole.

Fortunately for me, with the exception of bangs and bruises and falling off of a ladder a couple times, the closest I've come to a serious injury was when I shot myself in the hand with a nailgun--fortunately for me, a thin finishing nail. Later I did carpentry jobs as a side business, but luckily I no longer have to hang off the side of buildings or do other hazardous jobs. Most of my carpentry skills now are applied toward building my kids a bunk bed or a lemonade stand. But whenever I hear middle-class feminists like Crittenden tell us of her woes as a woman (and Crittenden, who uses herself as an example of motherly victimhood, tells us plenty of her personal woes), I think of those men and of the sacrifices they make to provide for their families and to give them safety and security--safety and security that they themselves will probably never have.

My life changed dramatically when my second child was born--I switched from the traditional father role to the traditional mother role. Now my wife enthusiastically pursues her new career and I've cut my work schedule back to care for our daughter during the day. I do all the cooking (and we never eat out or take in), the dishes, the shopping, the chauffeuring, the laundry, and the errands. Exactly as Crittenden did, I pursue my freelance writing career at home, in between my household duties. Crittenden is deeply bitter about this "sacrifice," but I consider myself to be quite lucky.

Which is better, paying the mommy tax or paying the daddy tax? There are advantages and disadvantages to both. It depends upon the jobs and personalities of those involved. For me, being at home with my young daughter has been the greatest, most fulfilling experience of my life, and I'll always be grateful to my wife for allowing me the opportunity. All of the "firsts" that I missed with my son--the first words, the first steps--I've been able to enjoy with my daughter, as well as countless other magical, irreplaceable moments. And there's nothing better in the world than when my little daughter walks up to me, puts her hand on my shoulder and says "every night I go sleepies right here." I have no desire to return to a demanding work schedule and be away from my kids. Given a choice, I'd rather pay the mommy tax.

Crittenden has several worthwhile suggestions on how to reduce the mommy tax, including universal preschool, a year's paid leave after the birth of each child, and full benefits for part-time work. I'm not sure how practical these ideas are, but I'm certainly interested, since they could help mothers as well as fathers and children. But how dare she, and other feminists, claim that the burden of children falls only on mothers? Yes, Ms. Crittenden, there is a mommy tax, but the daddy tax is just as large.

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