

The Mother-Daughter dilemma

by Greg Mooers

Once heard a marriage counselor ask an interesting question. He said, "Women are relationship-beings. Do you know what men are?" After a long pause he added, "Men are not!" We all laughed.

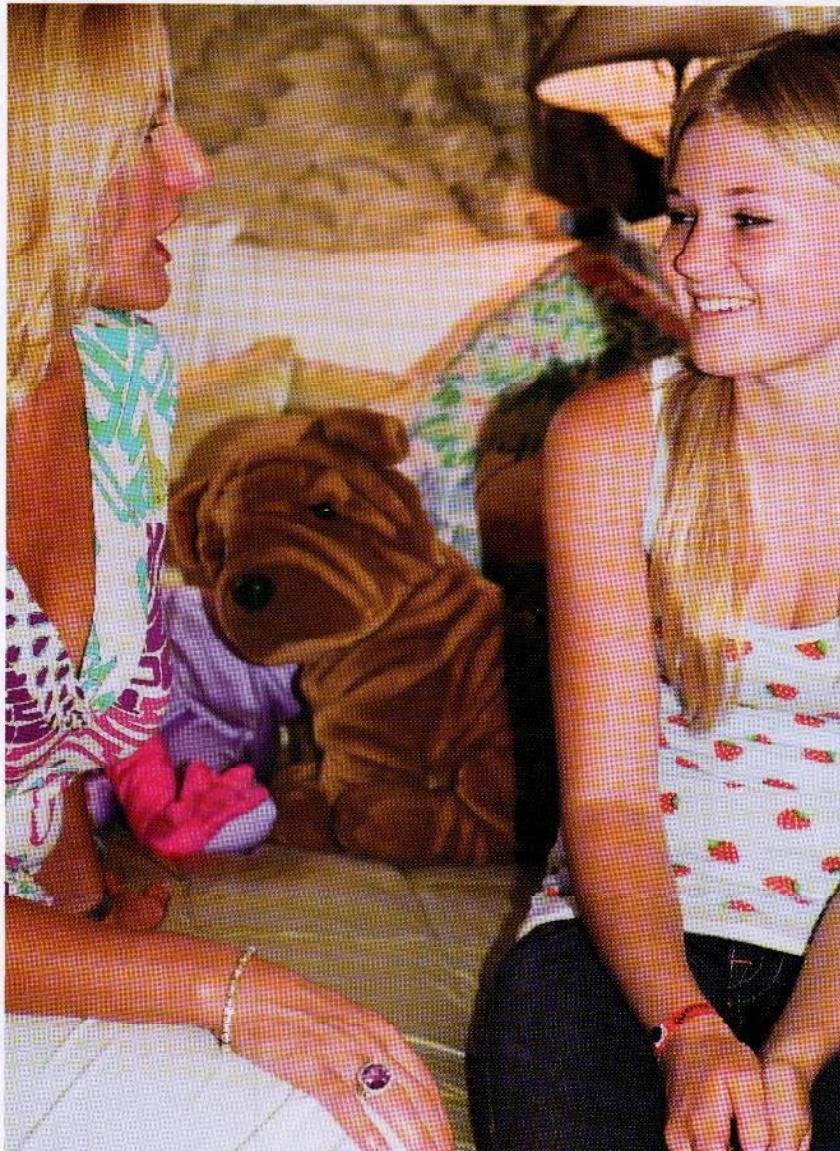
Being a public speaker and life coach has taught me that we are as different as we are alike. On one hand, we are all generic and universal, and on the other hand, each of us is as individual as a snowflake, thumb print and our DNA. Yet, no other differentiator has provided as much fodder for wit and wisdom as gender. There are more jokes on marriage than any other single subject.

In my experience, when a man is under pressure, he seeks his security in some form of independence. When women are under pressure, they connect with others – usually women. Men prefer caves and women crave companionship. Modern science proves this -the anterior lobe

(for emotion processing) of a man's brain is actually one-third smaller than a woman's. Evolutionary forces did this so men could hunt,

ensuring the family's survival. This also explains why men can do things like football, fighting, and fishing, while most women watching are thinking, "That's pretty stupid!"

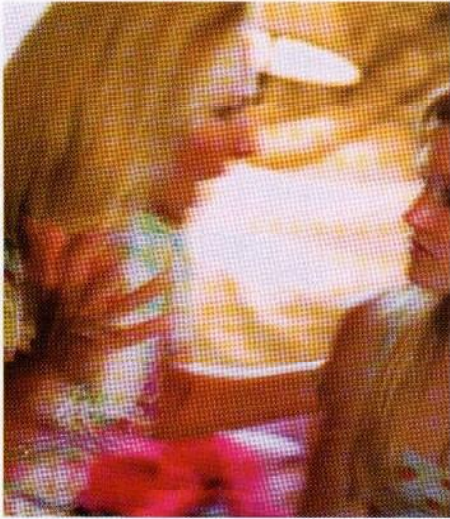
an emotional conversation. Men long to retire to their 'den' to think things out in the midst of a dispute, whereas women generally long to talk things out, in order to reach clarity.



So, what happens when mothers and daughters disagree? We might assume that their emotional capabilities would lead to quick resolution, but once youngsters reach maturity, a unique battleground emerges in even the happiest of homes. In my career as a relationship trainer, I've worked with dozens of mother-daughter pairs and I've seen these relationship dynamics played out in both healthy and unhealthy ways.

This means that men are biologically incapable of processing as much emotion as women, as they get flooded or overwhelmed sooner in

Both mother and daughter as females will tend to seek security through relationship. The problem is, this dependence, although soothing, is



debilitating to the growth of the daughter's independence. Whereas co-dependence is natural between mothers and infants, the rites of passage associated with the teenage years are an awkward place for both mother and daughter. Compare this to the father and son relationship: Dad puts pressure on junior and he moves out (because both are wired for independence). But when mom tries to nudge her little princess out of the nest, any insecurity will result in both relying on each other for reassurance. That's the dilemma of the mother/daughter relationship.

What can a mother do? Well, the first step is to learn to acknowledge boundaries. If your daughter is over the age of 21 and you're still paying her bills, stop! This includes car, insurance, rent, mortgage, or whatever. If we reflect about why we pay our children's bills, often it is because our identity is so interwoven that we are actually living through our children, to some degree. This 'emotional umbilical' connection becomes increasingly unhealthy for maturing children who seek to establish their separate identities. Kicking the child out of the nest requires the parent to face the possibility that the child may

fail, with the subliminal belief, "If the kid fails, I have failed."

To complicate things, when the kids move out it's as if the mother lost her job: referred to as 'empty nest syndrome'. This identity crisis shows up big time in the rare cases when a mother's only child dies. Upon marriage, a 'woman' becomes a 'wife'. When bearing children her identity shifts to 'mother', but, what if her only child dies? Is she still a mother? A huge role is lost and the mother usually goes through an identity crisis.

The identity as a mother is beautiful and powerful, but if her success as a person is measured by her child's achievements instead of her own role as a powerful parent, she will decorate her offspring with success flags (nice car, fashionable clothes, a credit card, etc.) using the child to soothe her desire to impress as a successful mother. The same is true for fathers, but when pressure is put on the father/son relationship they will usually both gravitate to independence and the teenager leaves the nest on his own.

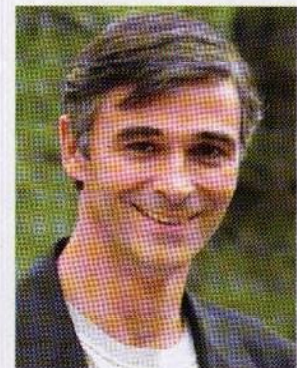
This process truly begins about age 13. Beyond that, parents would be well served to acknowledge their roles will increasingly shift. At a certain point, their main responsibilities are to be a positive role model, a compassionate listener, and increasingly detached to respect the choices of each child! Indeed, the degree of difficulty of these challenges is proof that the parent is struggling with their own sense of self, independent of the child!

Too often, I hear of the 35-year old daughter who hates her mother because she is so 'controlling'. This

clearly differentiates the diversity between love and control. If parents are capable of truly loving their children, they will permit their children to fail – because they understand the process of building blocks to success, called 'self-esteem'.

The next time your 20-something daughter asks you to take her shopping, ask her really engaging questions about what she REALLY wants and how to achieve it, herself. Then ask yourself what YOU really want – for both you and her. Then, tell her about THAT! Talk about boundaries, responsibility, and what love "looks like" at different stages of life.

Parent and child should make a list of goals for the next few years and share it. Talk about creating a sharing relationship that really works: About commitments, consequences, intervention – how to stay connected and yet, be detached. Above all, play your role as a powerful parent.



Greg Mooers is a life-coach who specializes in careers and primary relationships. For more info go to www.LifeCamp.com or call 310-428-0400

*Special thanks to
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