

Why Is This MY Job?

By Susan Gibson

"Why is this MY job?" The question popped into my head the other day as I swished the brush in the toilet bowl. Of my husband's bathroom. It pops up often, as I schlep laundry from the dryer to the bedroom to fold his bazillion t-shirts. It comes up when I'm wiping up the counter after dinner when he's finished loading the dishwasher. I drag out the recyclables, clean out the litter box, and keep our social calendar. Why is all this MY job?

This is not a rant against my husband. He gives me little to complain about in other ways. I think it is a pervasive problem in the average American household. But is it genetic? There's supposed to be a "maternal" gene that women in general have that allows them to mother their children appropriately. So is there also a "domestic" gene that makes women better at household tasks?

Perhaps it isn't the lack of the ability to do the tasks as much as it is the ability to see that the tasks need to be done. In general, men cannot see dust, pet hair, food stains, or crumbs. They are blind to gobs of toothpaste in the sink, dirty underwear bursting out of the hamper, or the hairball Muffin coughed up this morning. In the rare instances when they do actually see some of these things, they will be sure to draw it to their wife's attention so she can resolve it.

It can't be upbringing. Although we had the same mother, I always made my bed and put away my clothes while my brother was doing science experiments with bread mold cultured under his bed. How many mothers leave dirty dishes to pile up until there are no remaining clean ones? How many families have to walk over garbage to get out the back door? These things do not happen, because mothers are unable to tolerate dirt and disorder.

Then I must ask, do men have some corresponding useful gene? I'm not sure about the "useful" part, but it does seem men have a natural, unlearned familiarity with cars, sports, and computers. Two of my nephews were discussing the car the college-age one was handing down to the 16-year old. The older mentioned some noise the car was making, and the younger one said, "Yeah, it probably has a cracked manifold." Now I know cars have engines, batteries, and a place to put the windshield washer fluid. Manifold? Where do they learn these things? I don't remember our high school ever offering a class in auto mechanics. Men just seem to know.

In my household this is especially true of computers. My husband has never taken a basic computer class and rarely uses the programs I use most frequently. Yet he can diagnose and solve my problem without even seeing my laptop; I simply yell down to the basement where he is flying an F-16 on his flight simulator, and he can tell me what to do. (Fighter planes, that's another mysterious area of men's knowledge.)

Perhaps the answer is that, if given proper instruction, women could master all these "manly" areas of knowledge. We just don't have time; we're too busy cleaning the oven.

Susan writes from Greenfield, Wisconsin where she lives with her husband Bob and two cats. She works as a pharmacist and enjoys writing, hiking, reading, knitting, drawing and music. Susan has led women's Bible studies, edited the church newsletter, published a book of prayers she wrote for her church, and coordinated a team of congregational pray-ers.