

To John, The first entry needs to be permanent. The rest need needs to be in reverse date order. Viz latest first, oldest last.

The blog of Old Grey Wolf

Disclaimer. These are personal views, and not necessarily those of the Branch Committee still less of Families Need Fathers as a whole

Introduction and personal statement

My identity is not public, though anyone with an NVQ1 in detection will be able to work it out.

We all have 'memorable days'. For many of us its our wife's birthday. How do we remember it? Often, its because we forgot it once.

My 'memorable day is about now and the beginning of a message of hope.

It was a phone call from our children's mother timed, I believe, to be exactly when a call was expected -To say come and collect us. We are back from our stay with our grandmother'

The call was to say, it was not a holiday 'we' had been on. Neither me or the children are ever coming back to your country. You will never see them again unless you do what I say'.

Fast forward a few years. The children, by now old enough to decide for themselves, came home. The older one stayed with me until her second University year. The younger one until he was 26, by which time I wondered if I regretted their choice.

People say 'You won'. Actually no. A lot of distress damage and enormous financial costs could have been avoided.

And some of the problems they still have with their mother.

More details will doubtless be weaved into later posts, but just one more here. 'Contact' visits took 18 hours travel and covered 600 miles. The first one, agreed in advance, saw me turned away at the door with a promise 'You are not seeing them even if you take me to Strasbourg' (The European Court of Human Rights.)

A visit to an avocat (roughly barrister). 'Why?' .he said. 'Get the English court order ratified by the local tribunal. Then if it happens again, go to the Police. They will arrest the mother if she tries to defy it.'

Said this to her – and no further trouble!

Item on the 2rd May

1) If your children have had their contact with you denied during the Lockdown....

Early indications, few details, is that 'enforcement' hearings have be 'mostly positive and fairly quick'. If True, most welcome and even more so for being a surprise.

One of our wishes is that if children lose time with the parent they see less of, it should be made up later. Perhaps with an added amount. If applied, this would kill off contact denial and make parental alienation less easy to achieve.

Rarely happens. We make an analogy over buying an item, say a car, on rental purchase. Except surely children are more important ? If you default on the payments on the car, the debt builds up. If for long enough, the car is re-possessed.

But over children, if the parenting time they are owed is not paid, the debt is cancelled. And if the 'owner' refuses to pay anything at all, they are told they can keep the car.

No wonder it happens so often.

2)Email from the National Office. The BBC are considering a programme on Child Maintenance and Covid -19 and the lockdown. Good good.

Many fathers, having lost their incomes, are presumably not paying CM. The main issue is presumably going to be the grievances of the mothers who have lost part of their income.

Let's not deny this. There are deadbeat dads. Who will use any excuse not to pay. Just as there are parents with control of children who have weaponised Covid 19 to stop their children seeing their other parent.

Bad behaviour is not for FNF a gender issue. There is good and bad in every section of society.

The only people we see in London branch who are deliberately not paying CM are people protesting at double standards. They are expected to fund children who are prevented from seeing them. We tell them to pay up. Two wrongs do not make a right.

We fear that the BBC programme will be promote gender stereotypes. Lets hope not.

Our cause is the rights of children (half of them of course girls) to the benefits of good parenting from both their parents. And their rights to a relationship with their wider families – which contain equal numbers of men and women.

But what should be done about the CM problem? Where a father cannot pay towards his children living elsewhere, the state should, as it has over lost earnings and lost business, help with the shortfall. Many groups were not covered in the early quick but crude measures. As they are hopefully in-filled, so should CM

Item on the 3rd May

1)Domestic violence. The media is full of the increased incidence of this, and the need for it to be tackled.

Lets not poo-poo this because of the sexist attitudes of Womens Aid and their allies. There is a real human problem which is misrepresented for partisan reasons. I know someone who is living with an aggressive and sometimes physically violent alcoholic wife. She has twice been sectioned. He has nowhere else to go and if he threw her out, she cannot care for herself and could die of exposure. Its not fun to have a partner who is offensive and for some of us violent and even dangerous. And this has surely got worse under the lockdown.

People affected need support. FNF is one of the agencies that provide moral support for victims of abuse, even if we cannot help with accommodation.

The problem needs tackling. But as ever, prevention is better than cure. The issue is presented as one of 'toxic' masculinity. Policy and support needs to have a broader and better approach. There are often, perhaps usually, three underlying causes. Mental illness, drink and sometimes drug problems. Both men and women suffer these, causing damage and distress to their partners, children and often themselves. The Caroline Flack tragedy should have been a cue. 'Society' should look at these issues. Not promoting what it would be too strong to have criminalised as 'Hate crime' on the basis of sex, but should be called 'Hate Misdemeanors'.

2) David Lammy MP for Tottenham. He seems to be a rising star in the Labour Party. There must be among our attenders, a constituent of his? Please come forward.

He is strong on the need of children to have fathers involved in their lives. Also on BAME issues. Now all observers of these issues know that fathers of Asian origin are presumed guilty of domestic abuse, and those of (often indirect) African origin of abandoning their children. We see few very young fathers in CLB, but plenty of slightly older BAME ones who want to do something about their children being prevented from seeing them. Impossible not to believe stereotypes don't play a part.

We have tried to involve DL in our work, but have not even had a reply. The way to influence an MP is this. A constituent with a problem asks to see them, and takes along someone who puts that issue into a wider picture. Any takers please?

Old Grey Wolf had an interesting exchange about racism with the then David Blunkett MP (now Lord Blunkett) when he was Home Secretary. For all my white skin and plummy voice, I was brought up in West Africa.

Many of those involved in 'knife crime' in deprived areas of the UK are descendants of slaves taken from there to the West Indies. They have, (apart from 'white' ones implanted as result of the rape, or other sexual abuse of power, of female slaves) the same genes as those in my childhood country. But there, the boys of their age were the village childminders. In charge of gangs of younger children, some scarcely able to walk, taking us round the village showing us things of interest. They shooed us away from danger, and from where we were unwelcome. And from huts and people where I now realise it was not a good idea for young children to be.

The differences in behaviour between those in Nigeria and those in Southwark is not genetic but what we sociologists call 'socially created'. Blunkett liked the point.

Item on 4th May

The Guardian newspaper today has a long item about the unequal sharing of housework and child care in families worsened they say by the lockdown. It seems a bit early to have good data about the latter.

OGW has no problem, in general, with these allegations. But the evidence shows a steady but far from complete move in the direction of equality. Part of the reason is the death of people whose attitudes were formed in the early part of the last century.

Time spent on housework and on childcare are often combined. There are few ways to shorten the time demands of children. Not so housework. Frankly, it does not take long to wash cloths and keep houses healthy and good looking. The amount of time some women spend on it isn't because

they are oppressed by their menfolk. Its because they have unnecessary standards. Which is fine, provided they don't expect others to live up to them. The issue is not who does most but whether what is necessary is fairly shared.

But children, to repeat, require a lot of time, Some men don't pull their weight. Agreed.

But that is a funny argument to use when it comes to the issue with which this charity deals.

Stopping willing men from spending the time with their children that they would like.

Item on 5th May

The BBC website carries an item that one in four nurseries expect not to survive the lockdown, affecting a ¼ million children. Of course, everyone is pitching for more financial support to preserve services that may be needed later. Businesses which are economically strong will of course revive. Institutional child care, however, operates on very small margins despite paying very low wages. The problem is, so many of those people whose children need them are often not paid much either. Particularly, of course, mothers bringing children up alone.

The solution, generally speaking, is to assume that the state has to pay wholly or in part. The only alternative to maternal care, if mothers are to be able to get paid employment, is institutional care. This does not reduce the cost, it just shifts it to the taxpayer.

Umm, what about the enormous potential supply of free, and loving care from the children's fathers? This would not solve every problem but it would ease some of them.

The changing nature of work also helps enormously. The official mind set (as so often in family policy matters)cannot be understood except as a continuation of 1950s. When work was 40 hours in the day from 8-6 on weekdays and Saturday mornings. Clearly cutting out child care. But now more and more paid employment is different or longer than these. There is a lot more work available outside these hours. It has also dissolved the distinction between full and part time work. Lots of new possibilities, for both mother and fathers of integrating earnings and responsibilities for children.

These need exploring in a more imaginative way. OGW corresponded with Iain Duncan Smith (a former FNF AGM speaker) when he was the minister in charge of social security. When 'lone parents' on benefits were asked about their availability for paid employment, were they asked whether the children's father would provide day care? He promised to look into it, but the result is not known.

2) The BBC website has a 'spoiler' about the Coronation Street storyline on 'co-ercive control'. Its obviously a coup for any lobby to plant an item like that to promote their view of things. When 'the Archers' had a rural audience, the then Ministry of Agriculture used to plug how to deal with liver fluke in sheep.

In the forthcoming ephisode the female victim* of CC cuts open the perpetrator* with a bottle. This rather reminds me of the policy paper on Domestic Violence produced years ago by the National Association of Probation Officers. That organisation claimed to 'represent' CAFCASS employees. Within a few pages it made these assertions 1) That violence between domestic partners was never acceptable 2) That female on male attacks were to be understood as self-defence or a response to provocation 3) that DV was something males inflicted on females 4) DV happened in same sex relationships. Umm. The paper does not appear still to be used. But the assertions are still with us.

OGW once attended a meeting of NAPO to counter the risks of discrimination in the preparation of welfare reports on children. It dealt with race, disability and homosexuality. The presentation on the last dealt only with lesbians. In the questions at the end I said this. I had no problem with anything that had been dealt with. But was there not another issue. Possible discrimination against fathers? Would NAPO be looking at this?

This contribution was hissed from the floor. The reply from the Chair, the then NAPO lead on family matters, one Graham Walsh, was this. Word perfect or very nearly so.

‘The question of whether men, who are attached to their privileges in most areas of life, are disadvantaged in proceedings over children, does not amount to sexism in NAPOs view. Nor is it a matter we see any need to address.

When I took off my jacket at home, there had been tea or coffee - or something like that- thrown over me. Umm.

Are these attitudes still found?

*The Corrie storyline partly corresponds to this model. ‘Artistic’ considerations may cause some compromise in the WA ideal. Namely, the male is a brute, the female endearing. The woman is doing all she can to placate the man, but its never good enough for him. The male is ugly, the female good looking. Etc.

In real life, in our view, its rarely so polarised or so one-sided.

Item on the 6th May

I am writing something that requires mentions of the difference between ‘adversarial’ and ‘inquisitorial’ legal methods. OMG there must be a nicer word. Its too near ‘inquisitional’ .

This idea occurred. What example do the family courts set our children? In kindergartens, those in charge try to get their charges to ‘play nicely together’.

What would we make of one that said the stronger, the better armed one should batter the others until the nursery nurses decided to give them what they think they should have?

Item on the 9th May

Its not only on shared parenting that the UK is unke much of the rest of the world.

Most places, tomorrow is Mothers Day.

OGW used to send stuff to the National charity, but gave up as they were never used.

One was an item for suggested use on a Mothers Day. In the hope that its different nature might get noticed on the day – or at least it would state our position.

It pointed out that we were totally supportive of the rights of children to the very best relationship with their mothers. And that when fathers got possession of the children and tried to exclude mothers, she was the one who got our support. Shared parenting is to the advantage of mothers, for

various obvious and spelt out reasons. Like capacity to earn, relief from too much childcare, ability to contribute to a pension, possibilities of having another life....

OWG spent his early childhood in a place where sharia is now law. One of the best known 'hadiths' (sayings) of the Prophet is this.

He was asked, 'After God, to whom does a man (sic) owe the greatest obligation?'

'His mother'

'And after God and his mother, who is next?'

'His mother'

And after his mother and his mother?...
.

At some point the questioner gave up.

There are some who claim Islam is a feminist faith. With respect to their views, that seems off the wall. There is a sura in the Holy Qu'ran that says 'Men are superior to women because God ordered it so'. There is, however, an alternative translation that says 'men are responsible for women...'. Scarcely gender equality, but not so crude.

But when it comes to children, a father has greater obligations to his daughters than his sons. They are deemed more vulnerable.

In sharia courts the evidence of a man is worth twice that of a woman. So if the issue is domestic abuse, the testimony of two women is needed to counter that of one man. Unambiguously wrong to non-Muslims.

But in the British family courts, how much evidence is needed to overcome the claims of one woman?

Item on 22 May

An email from the International group tackling gender stereotyping and promoting equality Promundo. It originated in Brazil, then the United States -, both countries where national leadership clearly indicates a need – but now has quite a few international links. Its to ask for help with a research project into what images of masculinity are presented. If any takers... by TV programmes watched by boys aged 7-13.

A niche, surely, but a significant ones?

There are so many niches. Our charity cannot of course deal with all of them. But it could try and encourage and support people working in them?

Following on from the above....

Our society has made very uneven progress in countering stereotypes. Traditionally, that of men being leaders, activists and warriors with a downside of brutishness and control. Women as being nurturing and empathetic.

Much progress surely, in acknowledging the right of women to enter formerly 'male' areas.

Negligible, in recognising that men can have a gentle, caring side. Indeed perhaps moves in the other direction. The lives of young children – for example primary school teaching and many decisions of the family courts – is effectively gender cleansing.

But its nice to report progress where it happens

The Family and Daycare Trust is a charity that concerns itself with childminding, nurseries and the like. OGW looked at their website not long ago. Scores of pictures of nursery nurses and of groups of happy children and their carers. So few adult men that it was very nearly true to say there were none at all.

This has changed.

A bit.

Their 'headline' picture is centred on female seven carers and volunteers. At both edges there is a man literally poking their head in. Says it all, actually. Its just like the kids who when they see something being filmed can't help themselves but jump into the view of the camera and stick their tongue out. But that is how it is. However, its progress. And they have a programme for young 'socially excluded' fathers. Good good

Item on 10 July

During the lockdown London Branch has had not face to face meetings.
But telephone numbers have been public and some of us have a flow of calls.

These are comments on mine.

Almost without exception they have been from people with names that are unlikely to be those of aboriginal English natives. And their English is hard for me to follow..

And again, almost without exception, they have one feature in common. They simply cannot understand that there is nowhere they can go, and no-one who will pay attention to their (alleged) grievances. And they come to me in the hope that I have some power to help them, or can tell them who can.

And all I can tell them is our procedures. With all its formalities, obscure requirements, costs and interminable delays.

Now almost the only thing I know about the cultures that some of these people may be from is that they are different from the current British arrangements.

And to assume that they are therefore all the same, and all the individuals are too, is a logical fallacy as well as the origin of a host of prejudices.

But there are reminders of my early experiences. Now that was of what happened in one part of Nigeria under colonial rule. And they are the childhood memories of a man who is now old.

There were these routes to address grievances.

There were the colonial arrangements. They were, frankly, unspeakably awful. 'Natives' - as they were called - could talk to a white official. He could be faced with unstoppable torrents of words, full of descriptions of feuds and malice, often laced with accusation of witchcraft and sorcery. He could make neither head nor tail of what was going on. If he tried to impose a decision, what the relationship to the situation might be was unthinkable.

There were the 'Christian' courts. These were, like our Family Justice system, so long and convoluted that no sane person would go near them. They were also corrupt to the core.

But there were two 'community' routes. Most villages or networks had some authority figure, often described by the colonial authorities as the 'chief' or 'headman'. He probably knew the situation and the people already. He (this post would be too long if it tried to explain the status of women in it) was always accessible. He would listen and enquire – and sort it. He (or she) owed their position to their standing and reputation in the community, and needed to preserve it. So the outcome was not as arbitrary as it might seem.

Finally there were the sharia courts. These (then) had no standing in the colonial system. They worked because people took their quarrels to them and respected the outcomes. Some judges were corrupt, but most were not. They mostly lacked any deep knowledge of Islamic law. But were wise and shrewd judges who did what they – and the community – considered just.

They could sort out in a day, usually to the satisfaction of everyone who could ever be satisfied at all, issues that would take our courts months or years, near bankrupting the parties and consuming hundreds of hours of 'professional' time and mountains of paper.

People approaching me by phone cannot understand that this can be...and surely have a point?

Item of the 10th July

The 'Johnny Depp' trial.

Way off topic in a way. And the interest is largely voyeurism.

The thoughts of most of us, surely, is that 'justice' would be served if both of them were sentenced to long stints of swabbing out school lavatories.

But of interest to those who have to deal with accusations of domestic violence. The moves and counter moves...we will have to see what works. The first stint of Depp's evidence resulted in her barrister's attempts to provoke him to show his temper. It failed. Will his second stint, in which he was attempting to win credibility by candour in admitting some things and being complimentary about Hearst....Will that increase or reduce his credibility when it comes to disputed things?...we will have to see...

Lessons for this charity? At least two.

Possibly not even the participants in the 'incidents' will now really be aware themselves of what happened, so the 'who?' aspect of the case...

But 'What' caused it clearer. Once more, Drink, drugs and mental problems. None of them getting the attention they deserve in the debates about how to deal with abuse. That is all about the gender politics of it.

The second is to point out that in the family courts the issues should be – to look forward into what is best for the children.

How the parents have treated each other is clearly relevant. But it should be examined in the family courts solely from the point of view of what it might say about the future parenting of the children

Items on 12 July

'If he can see it, will he be like it?' is the title of a research report of the (critically) male friendly gender equality outfit Promundo.

It is a report on how men and boys are represented in TV shows popular among boys aged 7-13.

It is not pleasant reading.

Sixty two per cent of the violence portrayed was committed by male characters. Female characters were portrayed as showing empathy in 31% of shows, male 23%. Seventy five per cent of shows featured females as 'happy', males 68%. Female characters were twice as likely as men to be involved in parenting roles. And the female parenting depicted was twice as likely to be rated 'very competent' than male parenting.

OGW has lost the references, but there is evidence that boys brought up in households without an adult male are more likely than one with only one to be violent and get into the sort of troubles that some young me do. One component of this may be that they absorb images of what 'masculinity' is from programmes like the above. Which are also likely to have some influence on more fortunate boys.

And there are two implications. The first is to address the stereotyping portrayed.

The second is to ensure that the gender-cleansing of the lives of children is confined to excluding men who are bad role models, rather than all fathers who can somehow be targetted.

The Johnny Depp trial again.

So far of course its still one half of the case. His, and the cross examination of him by her representative.

No children involved of course, mercifully. Even on Depp's own admissions, this was not a situation in which children should have been brought up.

But part of the interest to us is how, in an adversarial trial, things are presented. What Depp claims (maybe he would) were suggestions to Heard in response to requests for advice, were in fact attempts to control her.

One of the problems is that so much depends on context and tone of what is said, not the literal words. A lifted eyebrow of a dangerous man can be seriously scary. And many a family full of love has had the words uttered, 'I will kill you if you go on leaving your chocolate wrappings on the sofa'

The issue in the family courts is that things like this may be used as if to be taken literally.

The need of course is not to award the children to whoever succeeds in maligning the other, but to try and achieve what best for them.

Mariella Frostrup's 'agony aunt' column in the Observer. It's usually a lively read, but anyone wanting to read helpful and sensitive advice should go to Annalisa Barbieri instead.

Her column does occasionally criticise women and says nice things about men. But not often. And not today. Nor last week. That one featured what might be seen as ‘parental alienation’. A father trying to poison his daughter against his ex.

This of course interesting, in that PA has been depicted, for example in the debate about the new bill to strengthen ‘remedies’ to domestic violence as follows. That is does not exist, and/or used as a weapon for abusive men to use against mothers.

Actually in our view, its not a gender issue. Parents who currently cause their children to reject their other parent are currently mostly female. But not because they are female. Its because they are mostly the ones in a position to do it.

We are celebrating, about now, the 150th anniversary of the death of Charles Dickens. When he separated from the mother of his children, he retained ‘custody’, in accordance with the law of the time of all but one of them. There is no known criticism of the mother’s parenting, but it seems they never saw her again. In modern terms, might this not be ‘parental alienation’.

Mention of Charles Dickens. If he were writing today, would ‘Bleak House’ feature proceedings in the family courts?

‘Every little helps’

Tesco, surely very rightly, failed to get exclusive copyright for this phrase.

But it could also apply to trying to publicly promote shared parenting.

One way of doing it is to encourage people to make appropriate contributions to blogs, comment boards, on social media and the like. Such as Mariella Frostrup’s column.

Women’s Aid and its allies dominate this area. It is part of their influence.

Could not more be done to counter this?

Now we have to be careful. Some contributors might link our charity and cause with other views that they hold. And these could put off other supporters.

But we could have ‘do’s’ and ‘dont’s’. The suggestion would be – only authorised people can speak on behalf of the charity. But people could, and indeed should, point out the benefits of children to both their parents and wider families. And could mention our charity as a source of help. Look elsewhere on this website for forthcoming guidance. Sent to but ignored by our National Office.

Item on 13 July

Papers full of reports of girls reading more than boys during the lockdown and that this will widen the education gap.

That girls are gooder in education has been known for two generations. A gender* gap that, unlike other ones, has commanded little attention. Except the wonderful and sadly missed Prof Ted Wragg.

Some way off shared parenting of course, but these things don't trouble me hugely personally. For the gender* differences are mostly modest and swamped by individual variation within each group.

Discrimination by gender (or indeed most other characteristics) would only be justified if there is clean water between the groups.

So the reply to a statement such as 'women make better parents' would be: 'What? All women better than any man?' Things should go on individual assessments.

*'Gender' as a term is generally seen as the PC word for sex. Well it is less likely to be confused with copulation. But the proper distinction (first suggested by the brilliant sociologist Ann Oakley) is that sex is the natural differences, but gender the one that are attributed in a society. So that to say that women give birth is 'sex' but that they 'stay at home' while men 'go out to work' is gender.

Some confusions are, however, hilarious. I once saw a form to be filled in for people seeking to adopt or foster. Did the family had a pet? If so 'gender of pet'. In the wacky world of social work values, would your chance of being approved be increased if you had a trannie hamster?

Animals don't have 'gender'. Wrong, actually. When I moved to live with my ex, we both had cats, Her's, lovely one, but a tom, used to occasionally stink out the lounge. Mine was a fastidious she, but was not allowed further into the house than the kitchen, because being mine made it 'male'.

Item on 16 July

We are a children's rights charity.

So when a good decision is made for the children, even if it is against the wishes or interest of their father or the person who approached us, the children come first.

OGW has spent some time with someone who complains he had been wronged. Been over the paperwork quite thoroughly. Of course do not have direct evidence. So its not impossible its fundamentally wrong.

But its thoroughly convincing – and he was not. The section 37 report especially seemed an impeccable professional job. Scrupulously fair, proportionate and measured.

The right decision – my view anyway - was made and his path to a fuller relationship with his children was set out.

Let us recognise this when it happens, give it praise and support, and struggle for it to happen all the time.

All the people who come to us are self-selected for relationship failure. Nearly all of them seem to us good people and parents.

But all those that are not will be among them. And will often not see themselves as others do.

A spokesperson for Women's Aid or a related organisation said recently, that she was unaware of a woman not telling the truth about abuse. Umm. Is this the only case in human history where lying gives benefits- but none the less only the truth is told? A statement not about facts, but attitude, and perhaps the policy of her agency.

We are not like that.

Item of 17 July

Looking at a book

Crossley S (2018) *Troublemakers; the construction of 'Troubled Families' as a social problem* Bristol, Bristol Policy Press.

The story of that programme to 'sort out' such families by 'targetted intervention'. A favourite project of then Prime Minister David Cameron and then Communities Secretary Eric Pickles.

It was initially proclaimed as having a 99% success rate in turning such families around. More methodical academic evaluation, which of course took some time and got no headlines, found it had made no measurable difference.

Features in common with the Kids Company fiasco. You could say, it does not matter if you are not tackling social problems, so long as you get good headlines.

The advice of those people who know about the issues isn't necessary for that. They included, over Kids Company, our friend Tim Loughton MP, then Children's Minister.

It's in a long tradition in social policy making. To assume that people who are a problem to themselves and others just need a good talking to. Backed up by making their lives harder if they do not change as they were told to. Though there was a fundamental contradiction in this project. Was the problem to be solved by getting the mothers (yes, only mothers) to parent their children better, or to force them to take jobs in the shabbiest end of the labour market?

So what about the 'other parent' or often 'other parents'? Let's not pretend that the partners (or frequently ex-partners) of these mothers are all model citizens themselves. But they are part of the cocktail. Of course, like the mothers, what they have to offer is a mix of additional problems and additional resources.

But they are of course, simply blanked.

Item on 27 July.

So the Depp trial has ended.

There are two aspects, both very important to our cause.

1) The use of sex/gender stereotypes.

Now ours is an equal responsibility charity with one purpose. Promoting the rights of children of having both their parents involved, unless there is a reason otherwise.

Gender stereotypes are relevant to this in only one respect – whether they affect the rights of children to the best parenting.

But clearly they do. Years ago the main issue was whether mothers were presumed, simply and straightforwardly, to be better parents.

The argument that mothers are simply better parents is still with us.

But Matthew Thorpe, once Deputy President of the Family Division once 'allowed' an appeal (court speak for approving it). A lower court had awarded residence of the children of a couple who had split up to the father who had been by far the main carer. His then wife was a career dominated workaholic. Thorpe reversed this decision as it went against the 'natural roles and duties' of the parents or words to that effect. This was only a few years ago.

I wrote at the time, that Thorpe always favoured mothers in such disputes. The only thing that was unpredictable was the reasons he would give for doing so. But there was a twist. He was sympathetic to gays. So our people were given hope. The straights among us could aspire to get for all fathers some of the gains that gays had got for us.

But the main agenda now is that men are to be presumed violent.

An article in the Guardian preceded it. That the trial was 'a feast of misogyny'. Excuse me, but had misogyny featured at all? It may be, that for entirely cynical and tactical reasons, Depp and his side appear to have made no issue at all of any stereotypes of women in general. It was solely this one.

Not reciprocated. Her counsel is reported to have made reference to the evidence, but much of it was deploying stereotypes.

The same ones as in the family courts.

Because most of extreme violence is by men, most men are extremely violent.
Quod erat demonstrandum (see next item)

Our argument is that it should go according to the evidence alone.

2) The second point is the 'balance of proof'. Another article in the Guardian, but today.

Is the 'balance of probabilities' the best test?

Unlikely that the author picked this point from us, but we got there first. In a recent consultation submission, on this website

Some situations there can be no alternative.

But in the family courts it is not X versus Y.

It's about child welfare. And the test should not be 51% versus 49%

It should be this – is the probability proportionate to the consequences/ Together with the additional point. Nearly all legal cases are about what has happened in the past, such as Findings of Fact. But cases about children are about the future. And if there are doubts, there can be monitoring of outcomes.

If this seems obscure, wait for an item in my head but not yet written out in the 'reflective items' on this website

*Quod erat demonstrandum (That is proven) or Munby jumbo

Ok we mostly missed the opportunity to use that one. And it's not directed at him personally.

It that being in court is just so alien to many people who now have to go there without support. And the language used is part of it. So familiar to those with a posh education and then going into law. But beyond most people.

What is a NonMol? What is an injunction? What are the differences between criminal courts, family courts and other civil courts? Shouldn't all of them be civil? Best of all, perhaps, what is 'ancillary relief'? Presumably an ointment to be rubbed in, to get rid of the pain for ancillary sufferers?

Its not just accidental. Its part of a system to make us dependent on M'Luddites

As some Ancient Greek said 'Think like the wise, but say it in common language. Then experts will see you are right, and everyone will understand you'

A PS. I am told it was not an ancient Greek, but the Irish poet WB Yeats!

Item on 24 September

1) France has decided to award fathers 28 days paid paternity leave.

President Macron set up a commission to investigate this. It recommended nine weeks. He cut it back to four, but said 'This time is an essential factor in establishing an important link between the child and the parents. The leader of the employers organisation said the change was 'good for society'

This is twice the maximum British fathers are entitled to. However, our provisions are hedged about with so many other conditions that their availability is actually far more limited -possibly excluding nearly two thirds of fathers. Take up is minimal, partly because of these conditions but also because the maximum payment is a quarter of average disposable income.

Finland, for example, give both parents over six months, half of which is not transferable to the other parent. So if they don't take it, they lose it.

As with the Track and Trace system, UK provision is 'world beating'. On one condition – counting from the back.

A bit of FNF history. Our stance is that the concept of 'paternity' and 'maternity leave' are at present discriminatory. 'Paternity leave' should be for the relative short period when the mother needs to recover physically and hence the father is needed to support both mother and child. 'Maternity leave' should end when most mothers have stopped breast feeding, which is about two months. Thereafter there should be 'baby care leave', shared between the parents but with a 'use it or lose it' provision for both.

We brought the (then) Equal Opportunities Commission around to this concept (though not to our proposed durations) and, briefly, Harriet Harman when Minister of Justice though she subsequently reneged.

2) Another report from Promundo, the international research unit into gender equality. Its about the impact of Covid-19 on their issues. 'Masculinities and Covid -19, making the connections.' The greater death rate of men is attributed to the norms of 'stoicism, toughness and self-reliance' which make men less likely to seek help – or to take preventative measures for themselves and others. And other points

An interesting point in the report– the use of the term ‘masculism’ to denote ‘toxic masculinity’. Encourage its use, so that ‘masculinity’ is less often linked with toxicity?

3) Sets off another point. That countries with women Prime Ministers (or equivalent) have dealt with the virus so much better than ones led by men. The pattern is so strong that the retired sociologist OGW has not even tried to apply the boring statistical tests.

It seems highly unlikely that the sex/gender of the leader can be the direct cause. Much more likely that nations with a gender equality culture produce both female leaders and handle any issue better.

But there is another distorting factor. That countries with ‘masculist’ leaders – in the sense used above - like the United States, Brazil or Britain, are particularly bad. Egos interfere with competence.

4) Again on the issue of ‘Sex’ and ‘gender’ and the differences between ‘men’ and ‘women’

Stop people – especially probably in single sex/gender groups – discussing this, and you would deprive them of the single biggest item of conversation. Except in the UK, the weather, and in South America, football.

But what is the ‘scientific’ basis of this?

Some obvious things are beyond question, such as men don’t – yet – give birth. And so are actual observed differences in any given society. But how many of these are the way we are brought up?

A sociologist (like me) or anthropologist will say this. Every society makes distinctions by sex/gender. They justify this as ‘natural’ or God-given, but very few of the characteristics ascribed to one side in one society are not ascribed to the other somewhere else or at another time. The cruelty of the all-female slave raiding parties of Dahomey, for example.

From the 1980s onwards these views were challenged by so-called ‘scientists’ who claimed that female and male brains were ‘hard wired’ differently. These became popular as they confirmed the prejudices of pop scientists and gossipers.

They have been in turn refuted. See Cordelia Fine – a neuroscientist – in ‘Delusions of Gender’ and, for an easier read, Gina Rippon – another ‘hard’ neuroscientist - ‘The Truth about Male and Female brains’ in New Scientist March 2019. Rippon’s evidence is developed more fully in her book ‘The Gendered Brain’ Vintage Books, 2019.

Quote, ‘The idea of a male brain and a female brain suggests that each is a characteristically homogenous thing and that whoever has a male brain will have the same kind of aptitudes, preferences and personality as everyone else with that type of brain. We now know that is not the case...‘Forget the male and female brain: its a distraction, its inaccurate’.

The Natural History Museum, which had a very popular feature which lit up parts of the brain which were female and then male, was made to take it down as misleading.

Tell this, however, to the average Judge, Magistrate, CAFCASS or social worker, however....

5) FNF must look with some amusement at the debate about ‘trans’people. Obviously by some tests of sex, they are one side, and by others the other.

For people like Womens Aid who need to know how to categorise before deciding whether allegations of domestic violence, for example, are true or false, these questions are fundamental.

FNF could not care, and often would not know.

Our issue is whether a child would benefit from having their input into their lives. This depends on what they have to offer by way of love, care, stimulus, support and discipline. The only problem about 'the trans' issue – and indeed any other 'adult' one, such as other aspects of sexuality, politics and religion- is that they be dealt with in a way that respects the age and maturity of the children. .

Item on 2 October

Someone rang me for advice on making a complaint about a judge. I had heard about the *Office of Judicial Complaints* but thought it might be useful to look at their website for their terms of reference. Below is the list of complaints that they will **not** look at.

Umm.

- A judge's decision or order
- Bias in a judge's decision-making
- A judge allowing one party to speak for longer than another
- A judge refusing to allow a witness to give evidence or admit certain documents
- A judge appearing to react more favourably to one person's evidence than another's
- A judge saying that he or she does not believe a person's evidence, questioning a person's credibility or criticising a person's actions
- A judge making an error of law or procedure
- A judge expressing opinions about issues related to a case they are hearing
- The amount of costs or damages awarded by a judge
- A judge not reading documents before a hearing
- A judge refusing to transfer a case to a different judge or court
- A judge reserving a case to themselves
- A judge refusing to correspond with a party about a case
- Fraud or any other criminal offence
- Court staff, court bailiffs or the facilities and services provided by courts
- Other bodies such as the Police or Crown Prosecution Service
- Solicitors and Barristers

What they will look at is, predictably, rather shorter, Just four items. The most useful one is perhaps, falling asleep during a hearing. They also include using offensive language, inappropriate use of social media and using their position for personal advantage (but obviously not if that was fraud or a criminal offence)