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## [Author interview: Impact of Fathers on Daughters](#)

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### Expert Insight

Several years ago there was some measure of relief among Choice Moms -- and consternation among some others -- when author Peggy Drexler published *Raising Boys Without Men* that revealed that boys in homes headed by single mothers by choice and lesbian couples were doing quite well. Now she's published a book about the impact fathers have on daughters.

So naturally I asked her a few questions to learn more about what she found in her interviews with women about the impact their fathers -- whether they have been an active influence, or an absent one, or anything in between -- had on them, and what the implications might be for the Choice Mom community that is raising girls without fathers. Dr. Drexler's latest book, published by Rodale (May 10, 2011), is called [\*Our Fathers, Ourselves: Daughters, Fathers, And The Changing American Family\*](#):

Q1: In "[Raising Boys Into Men: How Maverick Moms Are Creating the Next Generation of Exceptional Men](#)" (Rodale, 2005) the idea was that single women and lesbian couples can do a great job without a man's influence on the boy. In your latest book, the idea seems to be that girls develop a great deal in relationship with their father -- even absent ones. Almost developing a nurturing, forgiving nature toward the opposite sex. Putting the two research studies together, the obvious question would be, **do you think it's harder for a girl to grow into a whole woman -- especially in comparison to a boy -- without a man's influence?**

A: I would be very reluctant to make that kind of comparison, especially given the lack of long-term studies that follow children from family life to adult life. There are so many influences that come in to play.

I found it interesting that some thought my point in *Raising Boys Without Men* was that a man was unnecessary. That, of course, came mainly from the right, where I assume I was a target of political convenience. As the saying goes, "those who are unhappy with the rain would demand sunshine." The fact is, we can't demand a family structure, as some might want it to be. Not all fathers are involved and loving, and they are not always there. My point was that, even without a father in the home, women can raise healthy, happy, masculine boys on their own. They will not be feminized by the experience.

There is the very same potential for girls raised in homes without a father. But studies and my own observations say that there is an impact there that might be more of an issue for women. A father is the first man in a daughter's life; her introduction into the world of men, her learning experience. Some women in my study who grew up without fathers or had bad relationships with their fathers report an unease with men - even with casual relationships and banter at work. Is that a deep-seated emotional issue, or is it just missing out on some formative experiences? It's impossible to generalize. In fact, I grew up from age three without a father. I have never had a problem relating to men. I can't say I always understand them. But that's a big club.

Q2: Many Choice Moms took solace in the idea that they could raise strong, multifaceted men, in reading your first book. Although the goal is to remember that the dynamic of raising a child is nuanced and complex, with and without a partner, **do you think Choice Moms with girls might be able to take home the message that they are potentially raising girls who will be less forgiving or compromising in future relationships without the influence of a man in the home?**

A: Again, without long-term, controlled research, my answer is anecdotal. But I believe that, whether you're talking about sons or daughters, the absence of a man in the home can - emphasis on can - be a negative factor, particularly because it often comes in tandem with socio-economic issues. Studies show that socio-economics is a variable that correlates with a whole host of child and adolescent problems. But it is also a variable you can overcome with basic, good parenting.

My thinking here is the same for women raising boys without a man in the home as it is when raising girls. It is important for boys as well as girls to have stable men in their life who are consistent and available on an ongoing basis. These paternal figures need not be with a live-in father. Grandfathers, godfathers (or their equivalent), can and do provide stable, consistent, loving, playful, mentoring ongoing relationships that are valuable to girls as they grow and develop into women. I discuss this in depth in my book.

It disturbs me greatly when, based on religious or political biases, critics equate anything less than two-gender parents with dysfunction.

The lack of a father does not, by definition, remove love, patience, expectations, playfulness, discipline or any of the other fundamentals of a solid upbringing from the home. Choice Moms can and do bring all of it to the family structure.

*Dr Peggy Drexler can be found at:  
dr.peggydrexler @ peggydrexler.com  
facebook.com/DrPeggyDrexler  
twitter.com/drpeggydrexler  
Website: www.peggydrexler.com*

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