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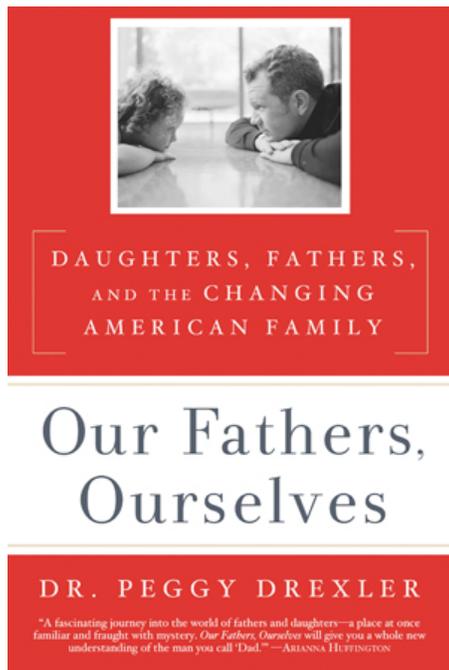
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On Our Reading List: *Our Fathers, Ourselves*

April 1, 2011 4:00 PM by [Jessie Heyman](#)



DAUGHTERS, FATHERS, AND THE CHANGING AMERICAN FAMILY

Our Fathers, Ourselves

DR. PEGGY DREXLER

"A fascinating journey into the world of fathers and daughters—a place at once familiar and fraught with mystery. *Our Fathers, Ourselves* will give you a whole new understanding of the man you call 'Dad.'" —ARIANNA HEFFINGTON

It's a psychological trope, one that Freud, Jung and Carrie Bradshaw kept coming back to: daddy issues. But this May, a new manual emerges. Psychologist Peggy Drexler polls 75 women on their personal and evocative relationships in *Our Fathers, Ourselves: Daughters, Fathers and the Changing American Family* (Rodale). Through heartfelt anecdotes and relatable analysis, she conveys the life-long effect of the father-daughter dynamic while offering smart explanation and tips for relationships. After losing her father as a child, Dr. Drexler offers a fresh point of view as she joins BAZAAR to make sense of this unshakable bond.

In your introduction, you write that losing your father at a young age propelled you into this study. After writing this book, do you have a sense of closure?

Actually, there is no closure. But there are things I came to understand. One is that lost fathers live in a state of perfection. Mine is immaculate – never mean, never absent, never short-tempered. He is, in a very real sense, the perfect father, because I invented him.

Which case study were you most intrigued by?

It's very difficult to single out one story over another. I talked to 75 women, and they were all

intriguing in the sense that they were parts of a whole. But at both ends of the spectrum and all points in between is how badly women want a good relationship with their fathers – even though some fathers clearly don't deserve it.

The style of your book is very interesting — it's a serious intellectual study and yet, it's very conversational at times. Why did you decide to straddle that stylistic line?

I didn't want to create a text. I felt it was important to include the kind of perspective that research gives. But I wanted to bring that to life with the stories of real women, with real fathers, with real joys and disappointments. Telling stories is, by definition, conversational. Relationships are human. I wanted this book to be human, too.

Composing this book must have been difficult at times; did your personal experience help or hinder your work?

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My personal experience – growing up without a father – was a help in the sense it has always been a motivating factor in my work with gender and families. Having said that there were moments of sadness. One was the realization that I had so few pictures of my own father.

Being a psychologist and a mother must be a powerful combination – does your professional training influence your parenting? Are you less or more affected by the actions of your children because of it?

You'd think so, wouldn't you? But, no. I've done all the good things and stupid things that all parents do. When my kids tell me something, I don't say "How did that make you feel?" I react like any other parent – I want to make it better.

If there is one quality in good parenting, what is it?

You could say love, or patience, or sacrifice. But I come out at a point somewhere between empathy and determination. Empathy because it's the soul of any good relationship and determination because there are parts of parenting that don't come naturally to us – you have to want it. You have to keep at it.

For fathers and daughters with troubled relationships: What is a small fix that can yield a big result?

If I had to pick one it would be for daughters. And I would say that you should work to see the man behind the assumption. Remember they are people – with fears and failings, strengths and hopes. Reverse the father, but discover the person.

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