

The Father Factor

How you and your dad got along when you were a kid affects everything from your relationship with your boyfriend to whether you can deal with authority. Read on for some OMG revelations.

BY ANNA DAVIES

▶ According to some intriguing recent findings, your relationship with your dad while growing up is one of the most powerful forces in your life as an adult. “That connection guides your choices in love, at work, and with regard to how you treat yourself,” explains Peggy Drexler, PhD, author of the new book *Our Fathers, Ourselves*, who spent years interviewing women on the subject.

After all, she says, your father is one of few people who’s been a constant influential presence in your life since day one, whether he was physically there or not. Plus, he is the first man you’ve ever known and thus has set up your expectations for how guys should behave—in your love life and elsewhere. Below are the five most common dad types. Identify yours and learn how you’ve been shaped by the father-daughter dynamic.

The Pushover

He’s the one who said yes to everything—ice cream for dinner, an afterprom party—and never busted



If he drops her, that’s 10 years of therapy.

your ass, even when you crashed the family car. Because of that constant show of affection, you know you deserve people in your life who’ll put you first. “Daddy’s little girls grow up learning that men can be caring and protective,” explains Drexler. And while you won’t accept anything less than good treatment from the guys you date, you may cross the line, like by trying their patience and expecting them to be okay if, say, you blow off plans at the last minute.

The same applies when you’re dealing with authority. Because you always got your way as a kid, you might unconsciously push boundaries by coming in late to work, relying on a wide-eyed apology as an antidote to a mistake, or snapping when your boss doesn’t appreciate your efforts, says Linda Nielsen, EdD, professor of psychology at Wake Forest University and author of *Between Fathers and Daughters*.

The Tough-Love Type

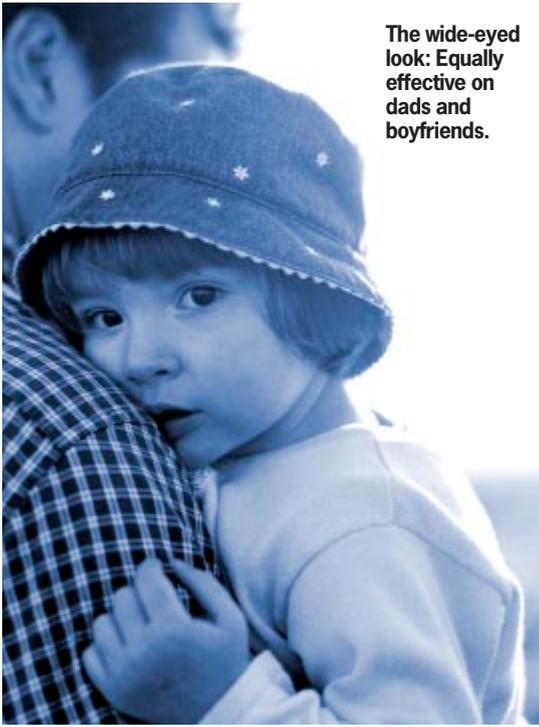
He was proud of you...but brought it up if you fell short of being perfect. Maybe he zeroed in on the lowest grade on your report card or wondered out loud why your soccer coach

didn’t play you as a starter. “These dads don’t treat their daughters as fragile flowers, and they think criticism is a way to toughen them up for the world,” explains Nielsen.

Growing up in an environment like this makes you strong, motivated, and someone who doesn’t back down easily from a challenge—all great traits. But if you got the message that you had to be better, this could cause you to be a little too intense when trying to win approval from your guy (or even your boss) instead of trusting your gut, which can put a strain on your relationships. That attitude can also leave you sensitive to any criticism, even a mild joke from a well-meaning boyfriend or husband.

The Distant Dad

Maybe he worked late, so you saw him for only a few hours during the week. He’d ask you questions about your day, but he never remembered the names of your friends or teachers. “It’s common for some fathers to tune out once their daughters reach adolescence because they don’t know how to connect,” explains Nielsen. That may mean that your dad really reacted only



The wide-eyed look: Equally effective on dads and boyfriends.

you're great at being one of the boys—meaning you are comfortable working in a guy-dominated field, good at communicating with male bosses, and can hold your own during dude-type trash talk.

But your assumption that gender differences aren't important can backfire when it comes to your love life. For instance, you're unlikely to pick up on clues that your guy friend has a crush on you or your boyfriend is craving affection. Another consequence: Because your dad snubbed bound-

aries, you too tend to overstep... and may make a new man uncomfortable by bringing up personal stuff in a too-casual, ribbing sort of way.

The Absentee or Asshole

Even if you spent most of your childhood without a father in the picture, you've probably still created an image of him that can take up significant

mental real estate, says Drexler. "Surprisingly, women who have never met their dad often imagine him as an ideal guy, one who'd understand them or never criticize them," she says. That fantasy can help you deal as a kid, but it has other implications in terms of your relationship with men as an adult. You may find yourself getting upset and critical every time your guy shows flaws or falling apart when your boss reprimands you—all because they're not living up to your expectations of how men should act.

On the other hand, if your dad walked out on your family or was a total jerk, you may assume that eventually, all guys are going to disappoint you or leave you, preventing you from committing fully...or purposefully sabotaging relationships so you won't be caught off guard if it doesn't work out.

In either case, it's helpful to figure out who your dad really was by talking to your mom and other relatives about him. "The more you can see him as just one guy and not a prototype for all men, the more you may be able to let go of the preconceived notions that you're bringing into your love life," suggests Nielsen. ■

when you did something amazing, like getting into your first-choice college, or rebellious, like dating a bad boy.

Today, that on-and-off attention can translate to craving the spotlight, explains Jane Adams, PhD, author of *Boundary Issues*. So to steal it, you wear an elaborate outfit to a party, put in a lot of extra hours at work to score points, or are especially flirty when you're with a group of men. But that can make you seem inauthentic—to friends, guys, and even yourself. "You don't necessarily realize that it's important to tone it down at times and that you don't need to always be 'exceptional' for people to like you," says Adams.

The Buddy

This is the guy you not only looked up to but could also actually identify with. These fathers worked hard never to treat their daughters differently than they would a son, explains Drexler, which might mean he brought you along to watch the game with his cronies, had you help him with home-improvement projects, or pushed you into traditionally male activities, like woodworking classes. As a result,

3 Things You Must Do With Your Dad Now

Fathers and daughters can often get stuck in the child-adult script, says Linda Nielsen, EdD. These moves will help you get to know each other as grown-ups and evolve your relationship.

● **Invite him to the office.** Having him meet your coworkers and boss will make him

proud of what a competent daughter he's raised. Then take him out to lunch (and pick up the tab!) and talk about what his own work life—the side of him you never see—is like.

● **Go to a beer tasting together.** It can be easier to get your dad to open up when he's engaged in

a fun activity. Ask him to tell you some crazy stories from his life before he met your mom.

● **Talk on the phone.** Call him up just to chat. Break the habit of discussing only logistics (money, etc.) and have an actual regular conversation that centers on personal stuff.