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Peggy Drexler

Lost and Found: Why Daughters Are Redefining Fathers

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As women storm the world of men, many are finding that part of the time-honored connection with the first man in her life has changed. In its place, however, is the opportunity to add new dimensions that were impossible in a time when father knew best. In researching a new book on a new generation of daughters and their fathers, Dr. Peggy Drexler has interviewed dozens of accomplished women in their 20s and 30s. In this series, she shares her observations in a series of blogs.

When Daughter Passes Dad

Daddy's little girl is now a CEO, a physician, a trader, and entrepreneur. For the first time, a new generation of women is in a position to out achieve the man who was once her protector.

Point of pride? Absolutely. Easy adjustment? Not often.

Women out-achieving men is as clear as the numbers of women moving into the highest levels of their organizations. A woman as serious contender for the nation's top job and the strong and steady gains of women in each election cycle are simply the most recent reminders.

In interviewing more than 40 high-achieving women, I began to see an interesting pattern. Many were quite comfortable with their achievements and their power in virtually all dealings with men, with one exception: their fathers. This was particularly true when those achievements launched them into places their fathers have never been.

Interestingly, I found some of the same competition that has complicated so many relationships between fathers and sons. Serena, a hugely successful bond trader told me "My father is an extremely competitive person. Even when I was little, he never actually let me win - I don't care whether it was checkers or tennis. As I got older, I did win. And when I did, he didn't like it. He is successful, an upper middle manager, but I am now making multiples more than he does. He knows it. Again, that same feeling is there."

Others find their success a source of embarrassment. Andrea, built and owns a recruiting agency. Her father is a meter reader. "The difference in our lives is uncomfortable to me," she said. The problem is, he would never, ever, ask for anything from his kids. His old Toyota has been on its last legs for years, and it cost him money to keep it going. I could easily get him a new one. But it's not like I can just say: "Happy birthday, here's your new car."

More than a few found that their experiences in a world beyond their fathers changed their perceptions of him. "I feel guilty," said Marsha, a rising editor at a major fashion magazine. "I want to look at my humble beginnings and the life he provided us with a sense of achievement that I lifted myself out of there. But I can't help thinking that he could have done more, and made more, and it wouldn't have been so hard on us."

The world of men and women has never been an easy place to navigate. Times change, and so do relationships. It's no surprise that a new generation of accomplished, assertive women will have to adjust their relationships with the man who has had such a profound impact on their lives. The transition has never been seamless. But as I am finding it now takes hard work.