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## Fathers, Daughters and the Obama Girls

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Eight years is going to fly by. Just ask anybody whose children's formative years now feel like they were fast-forwarded on a video recorder.

By the time the Obamas move out of the White House, those adorable little girls will be young women -- one 15, the other 18, and ready to go out into the world.

Yes, I'm assuming that Obama will be a great president and will serve for the full eight years. Less of an assumption is that he is a great father and that the relationship he has with Sasha and Malia - and shares with the world to the extent the world needs to know - is going to be an open classroom for the changing relationship between daughters and fathers everywhere.

There is more to learn than we think.

I am researching a planned book on how a new generation of accomplished, assertive and self-reliant women is working toward a new relationship with their fathers -- where the drives of protection and independence are searching for equilibrium.

In interviews with dozens of women from their 20s to mid-30s, I have had the opportunity to dig beneath a central assumption that once girls flooded the playing fields, the halls of higher education and the workplace, the relationship between fathers and daughters would simply recalibrate to the one enjoyed by fathers and sons - maybe even better in the absence of testosterone- fueled competition.

In fact, I have found a generation of women who are discovering a new irony in the bonds they have with their fathers. As society's barriers (father as silent protector whose main duty is to hand her off to the care of a husband) to a closer father-daughter relationship have fallen, the personal barriers move front and center.

When those little girls shouted a wonderfully spontaneous and giggly "Hi Daddy" when Obama's face materialized on the screen at the Democratic Convention - it captured forever the high point of dad's place at the center of a little girl's universe.

But little girls grow up. Things change. The reciprocal bonds of love and protection are tested as they are reworked for new women in a new age.

I found many women who have had much more success creating a successful relationship with the men in their work and romantic lives than they have with the first man in their life.

The essence of the conflict seems to lie in the fact that they want the same close and unconditional relationship they enjoyed when they were the ages of Malia and Sasha Obama, but on their own terms -- without the well-intentioned paternalistic control that that is so often part of the package.

The search for loving equality is also often complicated by a reluctance to let go of their idealization of the man who raised them. Those who do make their way through the thickets of myth and idealization are often disappointed with the flesh and blood man -- where both flaws and heroics dwell - that they find there.

Some very successful women were uncomfortable that their achievements eclipsed those of their fathers -- a feeling that is unlikely to happen with sons. Others continue to doggedly try to build a relationship with fathers who, sad to say, appear unworthy of their efforts.

The Obama girls have given us a fleeting glimpse of who they are. It is going to be instructive -- and enjoyable -- to see what they become. It won't be easy to mature under the klieg lights -- ask Chelsea Clinton. But this is a family that appears determined not to let their circumstances warp their lives.

I'm betting that as we watch the relationship grow between two little girls and the leader of the free world, there will be lessons to learn for daughters and fathers everywhere.