



On Balance

By Leslie Morgan Steiner with guest Rebeldad Brian Reid

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The New Dad -- In the House and on TV

Welcome to the "On Balance" guest blog. Every Tuesday, "On Balance" features the views of a guest writer. It could be your neighbor, your boss, your most loved or hated poster from the blog, or you! [Send me your original, unpublished entry](#) (300 words or fewer) for consideration. Writers need to use their full names. Obviously, the topic should be something related to balancing your life.

By Peggy Drexler

If television reflects the state of the sexes, men are in trouble.

I've watched two episodes now of ABC's [Cashmere Mafia](#) and I see a gaggle of males who are insecure, dependent, jealous and damaged. I caught a few episodes of [Big Shots](#), and I see stooges with money -- self involved twits who endlessly discuss their sorry lives over Scotch and cigars.

Just this week on the first episode of HBO's [In Treatment](#), a patient tells her therapist about her boyfriend crying because their relationship wasn't going anywhere and he wants to start a family. "Haven't you heard," she said, "men are the new women."

In the Cashmere Mafia there is no doubt about the women: smart, tough, poised, stylish, on top and in command. But the men are hazy -- split among babies and disagreeable characters, not terrible as much weak.

Granted, this is a show written for women. But it at least raises a question about female experience and expectations.

Conversely, and interestingly, there is also a new woman on television. Pick a cop show, and the female partner is Dirty Harry -- only nicely accessorized. On [Law and Order SVU](#), Olivia even beats up an occasional perp.

OK, I'm not talking heavyweight social commentary here. But collectively, these shows say something different is going on in the world of men. There is a new man out there.

But is he the man we're seeing on television? Partly yes. Mostly -- and thankfully -- no. I'm all for the newly-expressive male. But there is a fine line between a man who is in touch with his feelings and one that clutches them to his chest in a weepy embrace. At what point does a man unburdening his emotions make you wonder: "Did Steve McQueen ever do this?"

Here is the good news. Studies show that men are, in fact, changing.

And one of the changes will have a lot to say about the next generation of kids: Families have moved to the center of their lives. Maybe it's working wives; maybe it's the distance they felt from their own fathers whose sole responsibility was to be sole provider; maybe it's another evolutionary click of the wheel away from the days when men went out in the morning to kill for food.

Whatever the combination of reasons, there is a new dad in the house.

According to Dr. Warren Farrell, the author of the book [Father and Child Reunion](#), the desire of dads to be involved with their children "is to the twenty-first century what women's desire to be in the workplace was to the twentieth century."

A 2007 survey by the employment Web site [Monster.com](#) found that 70 percent of fathers would consider being a stay-at-home parent if money were no object. Almost 50 percent of dads of school-aged children took paternity leave when their employer offered it.

Statistical evidence is supported by small moments. Men hug more, they help with homework, they listen more, they even leave early for soccer practice. Men have not become mothers; but they have come far from the distant, silent providers of the past.

So, get a pedicure if it makes you feel good. Have your back waxed if you want to. But by all means continue your evolution into a, breathing, loving, contributing member of the family.

I say welcome, new man. You have never been more important. And I know you're not the one I see on television.

Peggy Drexler, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry Weill Medical College of Cornell University, and the author of [Raising Boys Without Men](#).