



Fathers, Fathers Everywhere – Not to be Seen

By Eloise Anderson

MY THOUGHTS

I can't remember ever not being fascinated with fathers. As a child I thought fathers were the most important thing in the world. I noticed, even as a child, the difference in how those of my friends who had fathers and those who did not behaved. As I got older it became even more interesting to notice how mothers behaved when they had husbands versus those without husbands. Cohabitation was not the norm, but a few women had men living with them, and their children behaved more like those with no fathers at all. These were the observations that colored my view, favoring fathers in families.

Working in predominately black communities as a young adult, I began to notice fewer fathers there than in my childhood community. Where had the fathers gone? There still were children in almost every household –

men coming and going, women having children with each new relationship. Mothers were treating their young sons as men and their daughters as peers; the family structure was corrupted, each member seeking the father.

For me, thinking about fathers means thinking about what it takes for a man to become a father and the types of support he needs to fulfill this role. I think that in order for a man to become a father he first must become a man and must have children with a woman he respects and cares about. I hesitate to state that he will “support” because the notion of “support” is often a material thought, and I think “support” is larger than the material.

RAISING BOYS

First off, how do men become men? They start out as this little bundle; the question at the beginning is what do we want for him? How should parents

go about developing his character? What does he need to become a man? Frivolous behavior, lack of worthy aims, and lack of self-control are considered boyish. Manhood: reserved and selected expression, mature, consciously learned, under careful control of reason. Men are expected to control their aggressive passions. It is expected that the movement from boyhood to manhood is a transition whereby he learns to suppress or moderate his aggression and focus those energies into socially acceptable competitive work. There is also the expectation that he will bring to the male-female relationship more wealth than she; that he will have the resources to provide.

Without getting into all the issues boys face compared to girls, it is important to note that boys from birth are more at risk of dying than girls. Therefore, the first concern of parents and the society is to assist boys in getting in touch with their emotional self and to have a way to express it nonviolently. Boys have a need to feel emotionally connected. They need close, supportive relationships that protect them. They need male modeling from

their fathers and other men as well as modeling from their mothers. My observation has been that single mothers who bring men into their lives and homes who are not the father of their son(s) often abandon their sons emotionally and neglect them, leaving them on their own for support and connection – often from a gang.

Never-married mothers and divorced mothers often have in common unresolved issues with the father of their son(s). Often, unresolved anger is unleashed on the son.

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The more the son resembles the father in physical appearances and mannerisms the more he may receive the displaced anger of the mother. He learns early from the mother that men are no good, abandon their children and mistreat women. They display frivolous behavior, have no worthy aims, and lack self-control.

For those boys who live with both parents it clearly is good if the father loves the mother. I was taught that the best thing for a child is for the father to love the mother. All things flow from that love. However, I think it equally important that the mother love, know, and understand her son’s father, for it frees her to nurture her son, to

support his maleness and assist him in developing and understanding his emotions.

Widows are much better at supporting their sons' emotional maturity and keeping them

connected with their fathers because they hold on to the love, knowledge, and understanding they had of the father. The father – not frivolous, who had worthy aims and self-control – was a man, a good man.

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MEN AND THEIR NEEDS

What's to be done with men whose mothers made them “Momma's little man?” My experience indicates that we humans get our needs met in the family. When mothers are never married or divorced, what becomes of the father role in the family? Where does the son get the support of the father, and on whom does the mother rely? What kind of man does the son become? Carl Jung, probably my favorite observer of humans, said if a male is brought up mainly with the mother, he will take a feminine attitude toward his father. The male will see his father through his mother's eyes. Therefore, boys become men who see men as inadequate, brutal, unfeeling, obsessed with sex, and

uncompassionate. These men have injured images of their fathers.

Chances are the son will become this image. Many fathers' behaviors toward their children are not in reaction to

their children but in reaction to the mother, who herself sees the father through her own loss of father and the unresolved anger of her mother. Men who grow up with mothers who have issues with their son's father and her own father will see themselves – how? Unmarried men in America are more likely to have low incomes. They also are more prone to mental and physical health issues such as addictions, physical disease, and early mortality. They also earn less over their lifetime than any other group. Many black men, and more and more men of other ethnic groups, are unmarried and suffer these consequences. So it seems that one of the things men need is marriage.

Women are the vehicles by which men enter marriage. Without the woman's invitation, men become studs, constantly excited by new women and sexual challenges. With their invitation, women show men the possibilities of a relationship and convey their need

for a man in their life. Marriage is not the only way, but it provides the most dependable way for a man.

The problem society faces is that, having grown up in families without marriage, women and men do not know how to make a marriage work. If they grow up in families where there have been many generations of single parenthood and cohabitation, then marriage is a “movie” with no model to use when conflicts arise.

But even more devastating to men is that while a few men without fathers as models

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turn out to be wealthy and powerful, many more turn out to be thugs – unfit for family life.

I believe what men need most is their own fathers; they suffer from father loss. This is true for women as well. Many men who did not grow up with their fathers do not know how to be men, or particularly how to be fathers, because they never had one. A woman has no idea what to expect of a man if she has never had a father. She is unable to separate sex and affection because all she has known is sex, even though she is seeking affection. Fatherless men have no idea how to provide affection; all they’ve

known is sex. It’s what their mothers have shown them by the many men in their lives and how they have responded to men.

Men need nurturing and encouraging male role models.

NOW YOU’RE A MAN, MY SON.

The problem society needs to solve is how to get men and women to have children as a married couple.

More babies were born in the U.S. in 2007 than in any other year in the nation’s history, according to federal data. Also

in 2007, births to unwed mothers hit a record high of nearly 40 percent. Father loss in society continues to drive teenagers into situations where the outcome is teen single parenting. It drives women to believe that it is of no consequence to bear and raise a child without benefit of marriage. What will happen to society when 40 percent of the children have lives without their fathers? We should look to the inner-city slums for a glimpse of the future. A few unmarried families can be absorbed and supported, but not 40 percent.

In Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report, *The Negro Family: The Case For*

National Action, he voiced concern about the black family. He concluded that the structure of family life in the black community constituted a “tangle of pathology...” and that “at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time.” He also argued that the matriarchal structure of black culture weakened the ability of black men to function as authority figures. This particular notion of black familial life has become a widespread, if not dominant, paradigm for comprehending the social and economic disintegration of late twentieth-century black urban life. This was 1964-65, when about a quarter of black births took place outside of marriage. Now it's three-quarters or more. What is America's fate when 40 percent of babies are born into families without marriage?

Black matriarchy was a popular stereotype of the black family structure in the 1950s and 1960s. The motherhood role black women were expected to fulfill created an unrealistic view of the black mother as a “superwoman.” This image of the superwoman de-

picted the black mother as someone who conformed to the typical image of a good mother: nurturing and caring for her children but at the same time unfeminine, strong-willed, and domineering. Now, all women long to become “superwomen,” and the American matriarchy has been established. What will become of the sons of the American matriarchy? More prisons to contain their sons, and their daughters getting pregnant at younger and younger ages.

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

In the 1950s, '60s and '70s the society-watchers (the academics), women advocates, and policymakers doubted the significance of fathers in shaping the experiences and development of their children, especially their daughters. Today, I think society may be coming to its senses – fathers matter.

The society is in search of policies that benefit fathers and needs to know which policies push fathers away from their families. Father programs are searching for strategies that support and enhance fathers' commitment to their children. Maybe the keys to getting men to marry, and keeping men with their families and connected

to their children, are in the hands of women and the mothers of their children.

Women have to demand that the advertised view of men as immature and childlike be replaced with images of capable, grown-up men in intimate and equitable relationships with women. Also, many women don't really trust men to be parents and believe that they don't really need men to be parents.

Therefore, every day, everywhere, children are growing up without their

fathers. Mothers with sons should be taught about the needs of boys and men and what effect they have on the development of their sons, especially as it relates to how they view girls and women. Mothers need to address their own father loss and how it has manifested itself in their lives. Girls and women should be made aware of their behavior and how it affects their relationships with boys and men. Unmarried mothers of daughters need to understand that the relationships of their daughters are neither *their* relationships nor a replay of their failed relationships.

Poor fathers have different issues

from middle-class fathers, and our policies and laws need to recognize those differences. Many fathers who do not live with their children are not "deadbeat dads." They could provide for their children but choose not to. There are some men who can provide for their children and do not, and they should be held accountable. However, there are many more fathers who are low-income and poorly educated, who have weak connections to the

work force and who want to be a part of their children's lives but don't know how. What the

society should do is teach these men how to work, assist them in finding jobs, support them in maintaining employment, show them how to advance, and provide them with information, mentors, and support on how to be first a man and then a father. Programs that work with men need to be operated by people who are concerned about supporting men. Most women cannot do this work, mainly because they do not understand men, are hostile to men, and are themselves afflicted with unresolved father issues.

Men and boys have to be taught that sperm is not a woman's responsibility.

Boys and men need sex education taught by doctors, lawyers, fathers, and men of all professions. Masculinity has to be seen as something other than producing children that one is not willing to rear or reside with.

Where are all the fathers? Usually not too far from their children, watching – without a voice, without a presence, and stripped of their value.

Eloise Anderson is founder of the non-profit organization Anderson Resource Management Services (ARMS) and the former director of the California Department of Social Services. Her concerns in founding the organization are based in her experiences over many years with child protection services and its poor outcomes, especially for boys coming out of foster care. She has had similar concerns for fathers, particularly noncustodial and those fathers coming out of jail or prison who want a second chance.