



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 25, 2024

Published in the July 15, 2024 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 40, No. 13

Daddy Issues: Fathers Make a Home Complete

“A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle,” goes the notorious feminist proclamation. Yet revelation, reason, and science inform that this isn’t true for those very little women, and little men, known as children. Nor is it true of the grown women who raise children. Moreover, research illustrates dads’ importance with a finding that will seem counterintuitive to many: Single fathers actually have *better* parenting outcomes than do single mothers. (More on that later.)



EMRAN/Adobe Stock

Society today is a long way from *Father Knows Best*. In fact, significant because art does sometimes imitate life (and life can imitate art, too), the entertainment norm today is what *The New York Times*’ John Tierney in 2005 dubbed “The Doofus Dad,” a modern-day husband and father who is “lazy, incompetent and stupid.” That’s how the *Deseret News*’ Sarah Petersen described him in 2013. As she related, quoting Tierney:

“One evening, after watching Homer Simpson wreck the family car at a monster-truck rally and plunge on a skateboard into Springfield Gorge, my 6-year-old son asked me, ‘Why are dads on TV so dumb?’” wrote John Tierney [sic] from the New York Times. “Where did we fathers go wrong? We spend twice as much time with our kids as we did two decades ago, but on television we’re oblivious (‘Jimmy Neutron’), troubled (‘The Sopranos’), deranged (‘Malcolm in the Middle’) and generally incompetent (‘Everybody Loves Raymond’). Even if Dad has a good job, like the star of ‘Home Improvement,’ at home he’s forever making messes that must be straightened out by Mom.”

Petersen points out, too, that the “doofus dad stereotype isn’t new,” but greatly predates the 1990s and ‘80s.

The irony here is that the pseudo-elites disgorging these portrayals will often emphasize entertainment’s power to shape behavior. They will, for example, warn that portraying girls and women in traditional roles (i.e., as authentically feminine wives and mothers) “stigmatizes” them and places them in a *Handmaid’s Tale*-like straitjacket. Females must, we’re told, have “liberated” same-sex role models and be exposed to “girl power” portrayals to reach their potential. Yet if this theory is true, what does the “doofus dad stereotype” portend for fatherhood?

Whatever the case, the reality is that the conception and role of fathers have changed markedly in modern times. As clinical psychologist Ditta M. Olikier, Ph.D. wrote at *Psychology Today* in 2011:

“The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” (Jeremiah, Book 31, Verse 29)



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 25, 2024

Published in the July 15, 2024 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 40, No. 13

This quote from the Bible represented the power of the father as the primary authority of the family for many centuries. His word was unquestioned, his decision final, his influence dominant in all matters relating to family.

... The world began to radically change with the social, economic and technical advances of the 20th century, and with those changes came a basic change in the structure and function of the family — with a consequent shift in the authority of the father. His influence was increasingly seen as minor, even negligible, and his importance was defined by how well he provided for the family.

Dr. Oliner also places an onus on early- and mid-20th-century psychology for ignoring, or at least minimizing, the role of fathers in its research. The good news is that this began changing in the 1970s, and now, a half-century later, there's much data vindicating what common sense dictates: fathers matter — a *lot*.

Family first: The mother is the parenting duo's heart, the emotional side, and provides sympathy, nurturing, and care; moreover, moms' extreme family patriotism causes them, as Focus on the Family puts it, "to see the rest of the world in relation to their child." (kleberpicui/Adobe Stock)



Of course, by this time, most people have heard the basic overview. To wit: According "to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 data, one in four children in this country lives in a home without a biological, step, or adoptive father," related *Psychology Today* last year. "Their research indicates that children raised in a father-absent home face a four times greater risk of poverty, are more likely to have behavioral problems, are at two times greater risk of infant mortality, are more likely to go to prison, commit crimes, become a pregnant teen, abuse drugs or alcohol, drop out of school." This said, however, the preceding are correlations, and a critic may contend that a father's lack isn't the main factor. Rather, it is a deeper phenomenon — parental irresponsibility and dearth of virtue — that makes it more likely children will both be fatherless and exhibit the aforementioned social ills, the thinking goes. But is this true? Or do fathers bring unique parental elements to the table?

Focus on the Family, citing multiple studies, provides some insight. The traditionalist organization cited "Dr. David Popenoe, Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University and Co-Director of the National Marriage Project," who "has provided us with a good summary and overview of the subject." Focus on



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 25, 2024

Published in the July 15, 2024 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 40, No. 13

the Family quoted him as saying in *Life Without Father* (1996):

Fathers are far more than just “second adults” in the home. Involved fathers — especially biological fathers — bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring. They provide protection and economic support and male role models. They have a parenting style that is significantly different from that of a mother and that difference is important in healthy child development.

Focus on the Family continued:

One of the most vital aspects of a dad’s contribution to the lives of his kids lies precisely in what Dr. Popenoe calls his “significantly different parenting style.” Men and women are different. As a result mothers and fathers parent their children differently.

Dads, for instance, love their children “more dangerously.” That’s because they play “rougher” and are more likely to encourage risk-taking. They provide kids with a broader diversity of social experiences. They also introduce them to a wider variety of methods of dealing with life. They tend to stress rules, justice, fairness, and duty in discipline. In this way, they teach children the objectivity and consequences of right and wrong. They give kids insight into the world of men. They prepare them for the challenges of life and demonstrate by example the meaning of respect between the sexes.

It should be emphasized here, too, that there’s something a mother, no matter how devoted, wise, intelligent, and insightful, cannot do: Model *being* a man. This is significant because, to use a twist on a saying, virtues (and vices) are caught more than they’re taught. And with respect to fatherless boys and criminality, a story from the animal kingdom is instructive here. (Note: Understandably, some may take issue with this, as people aren’t mere animals. Yet one doesn’t have to be an evolutionist to accept that similarities exist between man and beast. After all, they should, given that we all have the same creator and live in the same planetary environment.)

The Elephant Boys

After an inordinate number of mutilated rhino carcasses was discovered years ago at Pilanesberg National Park in South Africa, an investigation revealed the culprits: A gang of 15 to 18 adolescent male elephants. The reason for this unusual level of aggression was eventually discovered, too: In the late ’70s, Pilanesberg had been seeded with elephants from other parks — but only with young males, females, and babies — as large bulls were difficult to transport. Consequently, grown males weren’t around to provide structure for the teen ones. The obvious solution worked, too. When the towering bulls were reintroduced, the adolescents fell into line and began exhibiting more proper elephant behavior.

Of course, Pilanesberg’s erstwhile woes are quite reminiscent of the gang phenomenon plaguing America’s inner-city areas, places where fatherlessness is rife. Many of us have witnessed, too, how boys will naturally begin to emulate manly men who show an interest in them, whether the latter are good leaders or gang leaders. As with the pachyderms, having a decent father around leads to less emotional volatility. As Duke University researcher Jennifer E. Lansford, Ph.D. put it at *Psychology*



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 25, 2024

Published in the July 15, 2024 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 40, No. 13

Today in 2021, regardless “of whether they live together, children who have regular positive contact with their father tend to regulate their emotions better than children who have no contact with their father.”

This includes girls, too, of course, and they shouldn’t be forgotten here. While male characteristic sins are more overt — e.g. (the following is in male vs. female format), lust vs. vindictiveness; fiery tantrums vs. a long, slow-to-forgive simmer; drunkenness vs. depression — fatherlessness affects girls as well. And in particular, quite relevant here may be Focus on the Family’s observation that dads “tend to stress rules, justice, fairness, and duty in discipline. In this way, they teach children the objectivity and consequences of right and wrong.”

As to this, commentator Dennis Prager took heat in 2022 for pointing out that while there’s much focus on characteristic male flaws and the importance of teaching boys to control their natures, girls’ more subtle, but not necessarily less severe, characteristic flaws escape scrutiny. (Note: This can perhaps be blamed on the “Romantic Period,” which was a reaction to the “Enlightenment”; stressing emotionalism and the idealization of women, it supposedly spanned 1790 to 1850, but I contend that it never ended.) “Just as the male sexual drive and violent impulses can overwhelm their conscience and their ability to think and act rationally,” Prager wrote in a syndicated column, “emotions can do the same thing in girls and women: overwhelm their conscience and their ability to think and act rationally.” Girls “have to learn to control their emotions,” he insisted. Yet how much less likely is this to happen when that person who’d emphasize “the objectivity and consequences of right and wrong,” the father, is absent?

Focus on the Family is accurate, too, in its implication: Women are more emotional and more social-sphere-oriented (and hence more likely to embrace moral relativism), while men are more idea-oriented. Just consider research presented by City University of New York professor Jesse Prinz in 2010. “When looking at pictures of immoral acts, women’s judgments of severity correlate with higher levels of activation in emotion centers of the brain,” he related at *Psychology Today*, “whereas men show higher activation in areas that might involve the deployment of principles.” Also coming to mind is a study I read about years ago concerning how children would negotiate. Boys would try to make sure everything was fair for all involved, said the researchers, and then shake hands saying, “Deal? Deal.” Girls, on the other hand, would try to ensure that everyone *felt* good about a proposed outcome. Now, aside from the fact that feeling good doesn’t necessarily mean you’re getting a good outcome (con artists cheat people by making them *feel* they’re getting a deal), note the objective vs. subjective focus: The girls are oriented toward what’s within them and what only they can directly sense, their emotions, whereas the boys are focusing on the transcendent. For fairness involves the application of *principles*.



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 25, 2024

Published in the July 15, 2024 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 40, No. 13



Ideal: Social scientists will concede that the traditional family unit — father and mother together — is the gold standard for raising children. The combination of heart and head provides kids with a well-balanced upbringing in which, ideally, all the virtues are modeled by two loving parents. (Clement C/peopleimages.com/Adobe Stock)

The bottom line is that not having the more objectivity-oriented parent around may have profound implications for moral development. This *may* be reflected in research, too. Just consider two data sets. The first reveals that “57.6% of black children, 31.2% of Hispanic children, and 20.7% of white children are living absent their biological fathers,” relates Fathers.com. The second informs that only 10 percent of blacks, 15 percent of Hispanics, and 26 percent of whites reject moral relativism and embrace a proper understanding of morality (i.e., it’s objective), according to a 2002 Barna research company survey. Notice that the greater the fatherlessness problem among the group, the more likely it is that its members will embrace relativism. (Note, too, that the percentage of blacks who *don’t reject relativism* is almost exactly the same as the percentage who’vevoted Democratic for the last many decades.) This isn’t to say that other factors don’t influence this racial/ethnic relativism phenomenon; they most surely do. Nonetheless, it’s an interesting correlation, worthy of discussion.

But then there’s what is surprising. As mentioned earlier, when only one biological parent is present, it is single fathers, *not* single mothers, who register the best outcomes. As psychologist Elicia Jane reported at Medium last year:

For example, studies have found that children that from single-mother households are 5 times more likely to commit suicide than children from both unbroken households and single-father households, 9 times more likely to drop out of high school, 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances, 14 times more likely to commit rape, 20 times more likely to end up in prison and 32 times more likely to run away from home.

Interestingly, while many people would attribute these worse outcomes to the poverty single mothers may endure, it’s the “same story” even when the women aren’t economically hobbled, says Jane. (And, in fact, single mothers generally have more formal education than do single fathers. Perhaps that’s part of the problem?)

In fairness, Jane does present three perspective-lending reasons for single fathers’ superior parenting



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 25, 2024

Published in the July 15, 2024 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 40, No. 13

results. First, it's easier for men to find good "surrogate mothers" for their kids than it is for women to find "surrogate fathers"; second, anti-male family-court bias ensures that a woman is more likely to get child custody after a divorce even if she's not the better parent; and third, women are more likely than men to suffer from "mental health problems."

This said, the sane understanding holds that a father's hand is this: an indispensable part of a beautiful one-two-punch of parenting; he is the head to the mother's heart. As Focus on the Family also put it:

Fathers encourage competition, engendering independence. Mothers promote equity, creating a sense of security [this assertion is questionable]. Dads emphasize conceptual communication, which helps kids expand their vocabulary and intellectual capacities. Moms major in sympathy, care, and help, thus demonstrating the importance of relationships. Dads tend to see their child in relation to the rest of the world. Moms tend to see the rest of the world in relation to their child. Neither style of parenting is adequate in and of itself. Taken together, they balance each other out and equip the up-and-coming generation with a healthy, well-rounded approach to life.

And perhaps this balance is well reflected in a little story late professional baseball player Harmon Killebrew related about his early years. "My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard," he recounted. "Mother would come out and say, 'You're tearing up the grass.' 'We're not raising grass,' Dad would reply. 'We're raising boys.'"



Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.