

Why None of this Implies Men are Better Fathers than Women are Mothers

None of this implies that men are better as dads than women are as moms. Why? A man who successfully challenges the traditional male role has to be highly motivated; he is to the 21st Century what a female doctor or lawyer was to the mid-20th century. He is also more likely to be older, and have more income and education.¹⁴⁹ But if it is precisely these dads who are succeeding with their children, we need to support and encourage them to do so, in addition to their traditional role as breadwinners.

The most recent research now makes clear, though, that children benefit most from living with dad a significant portion of the time—not just visiting the dad.¹⁵⁰ No one knows exactly why children do so much better with significant father involvement. But we do know two possibilities:

- Item.** Recent research documents the harmful effects of parental conflict on children.¹⁵¹ When children live with only their moms, the parents are nine times as likely to have conflict as when children live primarily with their dads.¹⁵²
- Item.** Children living with their dads felt positively about moms; children living with moms were more likely to think negatively of dads.¹⁵³

A White House Council for Boys to Men can explore programs such as Dads for Life¹⁵⁴ or the Family Wellness Court in Santa Clara, California¹⁵⁵ that have been proven to work effectively with divorced parents to reduce conflict.

MBA programs and military academies such as West Point attempt to discern what creates a good leader and then train them to be the best warrior they can be. A White House Council on Boys to Men can discern what traditional contributions of a mom and dad result in the best outcome for children, and then encourage parenting programs that help single parents learn from the best of the other gender's contributions. Just as it takes the checks and balances of two parties to govern a nation, it takes the checks and balances of moms and dads to govern a family.

The Crime behind Crime

The Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency reports that the more absent the father, the higher the rates of violent crime.¹⁵⁶

Were these associations with crime due to poverty? No. When the children in homes without fathers with more income were compared to the children in homes with fathers with less income, there was no difference in the rates of violent crime. This study is especially significant not only because it controlled for the poverty factor in this way, but because it analyzed data from 11,000 individuals in a variety of urban areas.¹⁵⁷

Perhaps the crime that scares us most is the one that targets our daughters: rape. Eighty percent of rapists who were evaluated as raping out of anger and rage came from father-absent homes.¹⁵⁸

From an economic perspective, we spend trillions of dollars each year on police to stop crimes, on detectives to investigate crimes, on lawyers to prosecute and defend criminals, and on prisons to house the allegedly guilty.

The solution is ensuring that fathers find their place in the home (whether they live there full-time or not)—not just as a wallet, but as a dad. Which is also the most cost-effective solution to crime.

The “Hole” About Which President Obama Speaks

What is the “hole” in the psyche of a boy without a dad? For a son who has never known his dad, male identity is mercurial. He feels rudderless. For a son of divorce or unwed parents who has been alienated from his dad, masculine identity is negative: breeding grounds for low self-esteem, shame and anger.

A son who is also shuttled from his mother-only home to his elementary school with female teachers and no positive male role models, may seek identity from a substitute dad: a cult leader, a military leader, or a gang leader. A boy without a father seeks a “Godfather.”

Adolescence’s sexual rejection magnifies his hurt and anger. He is tempted to disappear into a bottle, take comfort through the point of a needle, or feel some life in the adrenaline released via an X-sport. Whether via suicide, violence, war, or an accident, he forfeits his life, mutilates his body, drains his soul, disappoints his family, and taxes his nation.

Solutions-in-Waiting

Item. 85% of fathers in Sweden take paternity leave.¹⁵⁹

Paternity leave in Sweden began in 1995 with one month of parent leave reserved for fathers (at 80% of pay). If the dad doesn't take the leave, it is lost. Since then, divorce and separation rates have gone down; women's pay and shared custody have gone up. Companies such as the cell phone giant Ericsson find, "graduates used to look for big paychecks. Now they want work-life balance."¹⁶⁰ Men's happiness with their family contributes to their effectiveness at work.

If, to paraphrase President Obama, no government can fill the hole in the psyche of a boy who is without a fully involved dad, then **the best a government can do is to provide incentives for a fully-involved dad.**

Here's why...

Item. A review of the most comprehensive and controlled recent studies reports that if children cannot live with both parents together, a minimum of one-third time for each parent is necessary, and that "additional benefits continue to accrue up to and including equal (50-50) time."¹⁶¹

Item. A meta-analysis of recent studies concludes "children in joint custody were significantly better off than those in sole custody."¹⁶² More important, the same meta-analysis finds children in joint custody are "about as well off as those in which the parents remained married."¹⁶³

We now have the research to know that if children grow up in non-intact families, that parenting plans for fit parents need to include both parents having "bedtime and waking rituals, transitions to and from school, extracurricular and recreational activities."¹⁶⁴

In addition to exploring the impact of dozens of countries' paternity leave laws (from Canada and Germany to Portugal and Iceland), some changes a White House Council on Boys to Men can pioneer might start with the fundamentals...

A male birth control pill. From our daughters' perspective, a male birth control pill relieves women from being the only sex to have their hormones tampered with—it allows our sons to share the responsibility. From our sons' perspective, if our son is with a woman who wishes to get married, says she is on birth control but is not, she can abort, or sue for support; our son can agree, or go to prison. A men's birth control pill gives our sons more equivalent options to our daughters. Since the pill is technologically viable, a Council can support its availability so both sexes may share responsibility for birth control.¹⁶⁵

Paternal Assurance. A boy who learns at some point in life that the dad he thought was his is, in reality, not his, may feel he knows neither who he is nor what his medical background is; he may become fearful of women, marriage and parenting. When a dad discovers he is raising a child that is not his, it puts that child at the risk of being abandoned. With 40% of American children now born to unmarried parents, the Council on Boys to Men must offer the best options to a ubiquitous problem.

Identify the best programs for single dads and at-home dads, and suggest incentives for their integration into high school and community college curriculums.

Just as diversity programs educate employees how to make the workplace a woman-friendly environment, a White House Council on Boys and Men might explore integrating father-involvement programs into high school curricula to educate our sons and daughters how to make the family a father-friendly environment. Or work with the PTA and schools to encourage dads to volunteer in the classroom; be more involved with their children at home; know the value of their contribution to parenting.

Propose legislation that gives incentives for all children to have as close-to-equal participation of both biological parents as possible, and that makes it illegal for either parent to purposely minimize the involvement of a fit parent.

Finance research to determine the most-effective incentives for parenting training and couples' communication training, and study the most-effective programs.¹⁶⁶

Prepare boys for the transition from military life to family life: how to retain the military-enhanced skills of discipline and boundary enforcement, while replacing the skills of objectifying in preparation to kill with the skills of loving and listening in preparation for parenting and partnering.

In Conclusion...

Nothing trumps children having both parents.¹⁶⁷ When parents are unwed, nothing trumps the children having about equal time with their mom and dad. Whether it is because children benefit from the checks and balances of both parents' different styles; or because children are the genes of both parents, (and knowing both parents means knowing themselves), is not certain.

What is certain is that in the last half century the U.S. has done a better job of integrating women into the work place than in integrating men into the family—especially into the lives of children in the non-intact family. We have valued men as wallets more than as dads.

And what is certain is that our current single-parenting environment leads to moms feeling deprived of resources, dads feeling deprived of purpose, and children feeling deprived of the full range of parenting input.

The Council can encourage federal agencies to examine how their budgets and programs can be used to support fatherhood strengthening efforts in the nonprofit and government sectors. The Council can also encourage private philanthropy, such as foundations, to invest in fatherhood work so that fathers can receive the training they need to be better dads.

A White House Council on Boys to Men can explore how to best give the resource of dad to children and moms, a sense of purpose to dads, and save the nation trillions of dollars that are the

cost of not recruiting fathers to reduce poverty and crime. It can draw up a blueprint to help our sons contribute to their families the way our daughters are contributing to the workplace.

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