



Author shares insights on raising boys without men

By KAREN BOSSICK

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Peggy Drexler is about to make a lot of mothers happy.

You can stop beating yourself up, she tells mothers who are raising sons without dads. The boys are turning out fine.

Drexler, a parttime residence of Sun Valley, will sign copies of her new book, "Raising Boys Without Men: How Maverick Moms are Creating the Next Generation of Exceptional Men," from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday at Chapter One Bookstore.

Drexler herself has been married for 36 years—to Mickey Drexler, who turned the Gap into a \$14.7 billion arbiter of style before moving on to J. Crew. The couple has two children—Alex, 27, and Katherine, 13. And, in true Sun Valley fashion, two Labradors named Stuart and Polly.

But Drexler is also assistant professor of psychology at Cornell University. And it was in that capacity that she embarked on a groundbreaking study 10 years ago that compared boys from female-headed households with boys from traditional mom-and-pop families.

"The U.S. Census reported that between 8 and 10 million women were raising children without the benefit of dads, and I was blown away by these statistics," said Drexler, who is still

involved in the study.

In fact, Drexler points out, only 23.5 percent of U.S. households embody the "Father Knows Best" kind of family with a married mom and dad and children. And the percentage of Moms raising their sons alone has tripled in the past five years.

The prevailing notion is that boys brought up without dads will become gay or sissy Mama's boys.

It's a notion that probably started with Freud and his notion that it takes a father to separate a boy from his mother, Drexler said. Others added to it their belief that a boy needs a man in the house to model himself after.

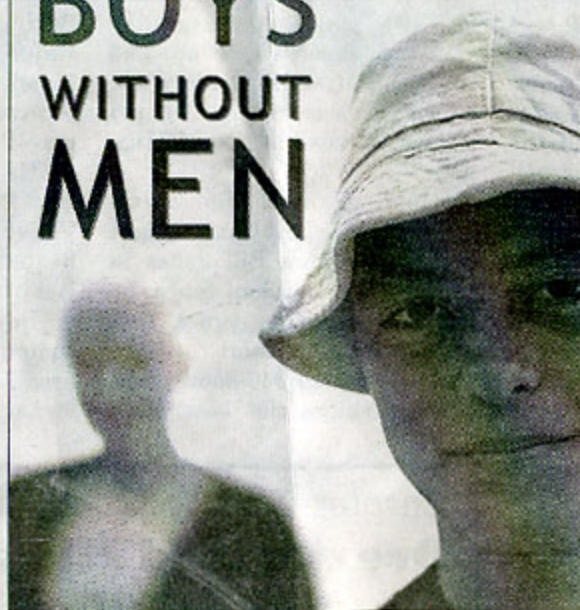
Whatever its origins, it's scared a generation of single Moms.

"I've talked to mothers who were widowed in 9-11 and they worry about whether their sons will become feminized now that they no longer have a father," Drexler said.

But the truth of the matter is that boys will be boys, she added. Boys appear to be hard-wired to become men, according to scientific evidence, whether

HOW MAVERICK MOMS ARE CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF EXCEPTIONAL MEN

RAISING BOYS WITHOUT MEN



they're brought up with a father or in a fatherless home.

And Drexler says the boys she's studied are doing just as well in fatherless families as in conventional ones—provided, of course, that income and the mother's level of education is similar.

In fact, she argues that some of the boys coming out of female-headed families may have an edge on their counterparts when

it comes to such things as being compassionate. The boys she studied were more empathetic towards others and more likely to use negotiation rather than aggression to solve problems. And they seemed more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

The Moms, in turn, worked hard to ensure their boys turned out well.

They talked to their sons about feelings and they expected their sons to do the same. They realized when their sons became teenagers that they didn't want to be hugged or kissed in front of their friends. But they weren't afraid to hug and kiss them when they were home

alone.

They made a point of sharing meals with their sons. And they encouraged a range of masculine and feminine qualities in their sons, from playing football to gardening.

"What I've learned is that masculine and feminine qualities are, in fact, human qualities. And the Mom who encourages her boy to learn to cook, if he wants, turns out to be more

self-sufficient," Drexler said.

Though based on a study, the book is easy to read. It's also full of stories, insights and take-away tips that any parent might learn from as they strive to raise their sons to be strong, loving men.

One story, for instance, describes a boy who was having trouble in school. His Mom was always dog-tired when she came home from work. But she knew the best way to get in touch with her son was to shoot a little basketball with him.

In time, both began to look forward to their pick-me-up games. And her son opened up, talking about his fear of being overweight and other concerns. They connected in a way they couldn't have otherwise.

Another mother recruited an older teenager to be a big brother to her oldest son. As the relationship progressed her son modeled the big brother, becoming a better brother to his younger brother.

Experts have called Drexler's book a "cutting-edge book" that challenges our preconceptions about what makes a family and what boys need.

"I am struck by the newness of her ideas, by their boldness," said Judith Wallerstein, best-selling author of "The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce."