

4 Things Fathers of Girls Can Do To Raise Confident Women

March 30, 2015 by [Ty Phillips](#), The Good Men Project



Ty Phillips is raising his girls to be confident, independent women, because who they are and who they become isn't up to him.

"What would you like, sweetheart?" I caught myself smiling while the little girl and her father neared the toy section in Target. She pulled him towards the Star Wars Legos and said, "I want these, daddy!" Her pigtailed head looked up at him, a smile beaming from her face. "Nope, those are boy toys, you don't play with boy toys because you are a little girl." Her little face frowned and she whimpered back, "But I want these."

The interaction didn't end well. The father lost his patience as he demanded that her opinion didn't matter because it was wrong and that as a girl, she only had a specific set of choices that were appropriate. Afterward, he barked, "Well, we're leavin', then. If you can't pick a girl's toy, then you don't need nuthin'."

He picked her up briskly and stormed toward the front. I could hear her crying and my heart sank.



Shortly after this encounter, I was back home and scrolling through Facebook. One of the first things to greet my eyes was a picture degrading women for looking one way on a date and another way when she woke up in the morning. It was meant to be humorous and started out in a similar theme as many do; “Bitches be like ...” and you can fill in the blank.

Shaking my head, I closed the app on my phone and just sat and thought. It seems absurd for a man to be writing on the issue of women and self-esteem, yet the reality is, men do and will continue to play a role in how women see themselves—especially fathers. How we treat our daughters and our partners sets an example of how young ladies grow up thinking it is okay to be treated. As the father of three young women, I think this issue needs to be discussed.

It seems absurd for a man to be writing on the issue of women and self-esteem, yet the reality is, men do and will continue to play a role in how women see themselves—especially fathers.

In a post this short, I cannot cover the entirety of body image and rape culture, but I can address several crucial things that I think all fathers should keep in mind, teach, and model for their daughters.

1. A woman enjoys what she wants, not what others decide for her.

This starts with respecting our daughter’s decisions when they are young about what they like; preferred colors, toys, clothes, and even cartoons. Our young women are people, not objects, and as people, they need to feel free to formulate their own opinions and be shown that what they think matters.

Toys, clothes, and hobbies are just that. They are things and pastimes to be enjoyed. If your daughters like transformers and fire trucks, blue over pink, and pants over sundresses, then allow them to enjoy those things. Their self-talk and relationship with men starts when dad loves them enough to respect them from the start. Neither a toy nor martial arts or basketball over ballet will make them any less of a girl.

If your daughters like transformers and fire trucks, blue over pink, and pants over sundresses, then allow them to enjoy those things.

2. A woman dresses how she wants.

There is a running theme that little girls need to wear little pink princess dresses and that grown women are responsible for being raped when they dress with less than head to toe coverage. I could not disagree more. A woman’s self-image and body image can be heavily dependent on how her father treated her, which means fathers have the opportunity to instill confidence in their daughters.

Are you always telling them to cover up? Shaming them for not wanting to wear a diaper or underwear when they are still only 3 or 4, or 5 years old? Referring to their body or body parts in derogatory ways? This, of course, will vary heavily as they age, but like all things, it starts when they are young.

One week my daughter loved dressing like TinkerBell and the next week she had to be Captain Hook, with her attempt at a deeper voice and everything. How she dressed, and how women dress, doesn't make them less female or sexually inappropriate. They are people with every right to be who they are without our attendant judgments.

They are people with every right to be who they are without our attendant judgments.

3. A woman is never a slut.

If a woman chooses to have sex with someone, or several someones, how does this lower her social standing, while the men who sleep around move up the ladder? And what right does anyone have to judge her for her sexual choices? None.

Sex is a personal matter, and who and when a woman decides to sleep with is her business and hers alone. Sex is not something to be used to gain status, power, control or self-respect; neither should it be something we judge anyone for having or not having.

The concept of a slut is a mental projection men have about sexual control. Some men want control over women, and when they lose that control, their reaction is to try to shame them. She's a slut, she sleeps around, she does this, that, and the other—when in fact she's asserting her independence and freedom of choice. The issue resides within. Insecure men project their own insecurities on women.

Your daughter's self-concept—and whether she will grow up feeling confident or shameful starts at home. How do daughters see women as a whole and themselves? To a large degree through their father's eyes. Is Daddy slut-shaming? Is Daddy hanging up naked women in the garage? Do we teach our daughters that wearing less clothing is rewarded with male attention, and that being who they are leads to rejection? Would you let your daughter date someone like you?

4. A woman has a voice.

Like the little girl in the opening of this article, women have a voice—their own opinions, their likes, and dislikes. Respect them. Your daughters' voices do not need to be a reflection of you (that's about your ego); they need to be a reflection of themselves (that's about their healthy development). Our daughters need no more protection than our sons. But they do need direction. And they need to know their voice is theirs, and that their opinions, beliefs, doubts, and preferences are valid and acceptable to express.

When you tell a child they are wrong and that they need to do this or that instead, they begin to doubt their own opinions and self-worth. Our daughters have the right to grow up free from our judgments and biases. By respecting them when they're young, you'll show them that their voices as girls and the voice they will have as adults carry just as much weight as any man's. Our girls need to be valued for who they are, not who we think they should be.

As a father to daughters and a husband to a wife, I have come to learn one thing; far more often than not, it is they who are teaching me.

A woman is whoever she wants to be.