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## Life Without Father

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Britain's Labour-led government has unleashed the hounds of biomedical and cultural revolution in recent days, voting to allow expanded research using and destroying human embryos, the development of animal-human hybrid embryos, the development of "savior siblings," and now equal access to IVF technology regardless of sexual orientation.

Until this week, British law required IVF clinics to take a child's need for a father into consideration when IVF services were sought. Now, this requirement has been removed and the new language simply requires attention to the child's "need for supportive parenting." This opens the door for widespread use of IVF technology among single women and lesbian couples.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown indicated his "unequivocal support" for this move earlier in the week and the proposal passed in Parliament by unexpectedly wide margins.

As *The Times* [London] reports:

*The Government had been prepared for defeat but won the free votes by majorities of 75 and 68. The decisions mean that the legislation will grant the most significant extension to homosexual family rights since gay adoption was sanctioned.*

*It will stop fertility clinics turning away lesbians and single women because their children will not have a father or male role model. While the current law does not block such therapy, it is sometimes used to justify refusals.*

The debate in the government and in the media included threats such as this published in *The Guardian* [London]:

*Whatever opponents to the new wording might actually be trying to do, they're not going to be able to stop lesbian couples or single women from having babies if they really want to. If fertility clinics become wary of taking them on as patients, says Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall, "They will go to backstreet suppliers, who are often using unscreened sperm. Indeed, there was a case four or five weeks ago of a man who was successfully prosecuted for running - I think it was called Man Not Needed - a private sperm service. They weren't screening the sperm, and it was being delivered in dirty coffee flasks. And that's the consequence. These women will not not have children - they'll just have children through dangerous methods." They might also try unprotected sex, for example, increasing their risk of contracting HIV.*

That passed for a serious moral argument — asserting that society must sanction children born without any expectation of a father because "these women will not not have children."

The case for the bill was also propelled by social analysis such as this, also from *The Guardian*:

*But "there's nothing magical about fathers," says Susan Golombok, professor of family research and director of the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge, and co-author of Growing Up in a Lesbian Family. "Fathers who are very involved with their children are good for children. But fathers who are not very involved - they aren't as important, and can even have a negative effect. It's a very simplistic notion to think that fathers are important just because they're male."*

*Don't boys need male role models? "The thing is that fathers make absolutely no difference to their children's development of masculinity or femininity," she says. "Studies that have looked at single-parent families have not found that boys are less masculine or girls less feminine. In fact, it seems that parents make very little difference to the masculinity or femininity of their sons and daughters. The peer group is more important, and the stereotypes that are around them in their day-to-day life. Even in families where parents try hard to influence their children's gender development, where they try to stop their sons being very masculine, for example, and try to make them more gender-neutral, actually find that whatever they do makes no difference whatsoever. Fathers are important more in terms of emotional wellbeing, not in terms of role models.*

Well, there we see the bold verdict — there is nothing magical about fathers. And as for the role of fathers, they “make absolutely no difference to their children’s development of masculinity or femininity.”

Does this “expert” actually believe this? Does any sane parent? “Absolutely *no* difference?”

The research routinely cited in these reports looks remarkably like the “research” of figures such as the late anthropologist Margaret Mead, whose “research” has been widely influential but also revealed to be largely fabricated.

The subversion of the role of fathers is nothing new and this British move is just another monumental loss for children. Our societies are straining under the weight of father absence and unfaithful or disengaged fathers. Far too many fathers have been the cause of their own absence. Far too many single mothers have decided to have children who will never know their fathers. Far too many marriages have ended in divorce and the evacuation or ejection of the father from the picture. Now, add IVF technology to that list, as single women and lesbian couples are to be allowed the same access as married heterosexual couples.

But don't cry over that spilled milk. The experts are sure that there is nothing magical about fathers anyway.

