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Why Dads Matter – James Q. Wilson on Boys Without Fathers

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In today's commentary, "[The Ties That No Longer Bind? Marriage and the Virtue of Loyalty](#)," I look at James Q. Wilson's [article](#) published in the current issue of *In Character*. Wilson makes a compelling argument for the essential link between loyalty and marriage (loyalty is the theme of the journal's Fall 2005 issue).

In his article, Wilson raises some issues I did not include in my commentary. Among these is the social danger posed by fatherless boys. Consider these words:

After holding income constant, boys in father-absent families were twice as likely as those in two-parent ones to go to jail and girls in father-absent families were twice as likely as those in married families to have an out-of-wedlock birth. What all of this means for the rest of society is evident on the evening news programs. Boys without married fathers populate our street gangs, and these gangs are responsible for an inordinately high level of violence. We rely on the police to control gangs, but the important, and often absent, control is that exercised by fathers. A boy growing up without a father has no personal conception of what it means to acquire skills, find a job, support a family, and be loyal to one's wife and children. Research on the link between unemployment rates and crime has shown that the connection is very weak. The connection between crime and father absence is much higher. Boys in single-parent families are also more likely to be idle rather than in school or unemployed and to drop out of high school. These differences are as great for white families as for black and Hispanic ones and as large for advantaged children as for disadvantaged ones.

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