Changing the Way Parents Raise Their Boys

Beginning not long ago, people began working toward their dream of a society where men and women were seen as completely equal. Today, many parents encourage their girls to pursue anything they put their mind to, but the way of raising boys hasn’t strayed much from tradition. Many of those parents still tell their sons to “be a man” and “man up” when their sons express emotions such as fear or insecurity. Society frowns upon boys expressing interest in things that aren’t seen as masculine and puts pressure on them to instead be good at hobbies such as sports. This common standard of what a boy should be like is an example of toxic masculinity, which is the concept of traditional ideas about how men are expected to behave is harming both genders and society (Kaplan). Toxic masculinity will continue to negatively affect society’s functioning today unless the new generation of boys is taught differently. Teaching sons that they don’t need to fit the common male image will lead to acceptance and dissolve fear of being judged. Adults must also address and counter the idealization of girls being promoted in modern culture, such as common phrases, to ensure their boys don’t adopt misogynistic views belonging to the outdated concept of masculinity.

Society should support boys who don’t fit the masculine male stereotype to promote acceptance of themselves and also of others. The general public allows only a limited range of appropriate interests for boys to choose from. If they attempt anything else, they’re judged and
risk being mocked by their peers. Kate Lombardi, the author of “The Mama’s Boy Myth: Why Keeping Our Sons Close Makes Them Stronger”, brings up a modern example of fellow students ridiculing a boy for breaking the gender barrier because he joined the high school girls’ field hockey team and was forced to wear a skirt (Lombardi). All families need to emphasize early in their kids’ lives that gender barriers shouldn’t affect what they like or dislike. This approach will help prevent mockery towards anyone in the future as children won’t feel the need to make fun of others in order to make themselves more secure. Parents must greet situations, like the one Lombardi mentioned, with open arms to encourage their sons’ positive growth. Otherwise, they’ll be scared to be themselves and fear being judged by the familiar people in their life. The community must recognize that redefining masculinity is pertinent to protecting boys who don’t necessarily match the outdated idea of what a man should be like.

Furthermore, an adjunct lecturer at Northwestern University, Tim King, states that parents shouldn’t be “forcing a square peg into a round hole” and instead should instill a sense of self-respect (King). Girls are finally able to pursue what they want, no matter if what they’re pursuing was originally established as for boys only, so why are boys still restricted to a narrow role with expectations of showing masculinity? Parents shouldn’t encourage gender roles when they’re raising children so their kids will flourish doing what they’re passionate about rather than what society expects them to do. Adults must disregard the prevalent concept of the male stereotype when raising their sons to encourage acceptance of others and reduce risk of being judged.

Another concept promoted in society that parents should address is misogyny through how women are generally portrayed. Claire Cain Miller, a New York Times writer who was part
of a team that won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for public service for reporting on workplace sexual harassment issues, shared a survey where half of the boys reported hearing male family members make sexual comments or jokes about girls (Miller). In addition, half of girls age 14 to 19 heard boys saying those types of remarks daily (Miller). Parents make instrumental impressions on their children that will likely impact their own behavior for the rest of their lives. This role modeling, whether positive or negative, will prompt their kids to follow their lead and repeat the comments themselves. Furthermore, this supports the promotion of misogyny by objectifying women through crude jokes. Rather, these parents should not encourage the idealization of women in society by eliminating such comments from their households.

Moreover, outside of one’s home, general culture gives sustained exposure to unrealistic portrayal of women. This may impact a boy’s way of thinking as he may be frequently playing violent video games that often feature degrading women characters or hearing sayings like “bros before hoes” from his friends and peers (Lombardi). As parents aren’t able to simply change today’s culture like they can change what they say in their home, they must talk with their sons about this issue. Boys must realize that they can’t adopt these views as that perspective is lingering from past history and shouldn’t take an active role in this world any longer. Parents need to ensure the new generation starts fresh to take advantage of this more accepting environment, without any hindrance from what past generations worked to fix. Otherwise, time drags by trying to weed out remaining misogyny in men when instead these children can grow up furthering and cementing those social advances already put in motion. Boys need to be told by parents that they should not be influenced by the misogyny present in their lives or they’re at risk of taking that perspective.
Some may say that it is boys’ nature to gravitate towards things such as wanting to fight rather than using words. That their tendencies for mildly violent imaginations should be ignored because they’ve always acted that way. It is true that some young boys can possess these traits and grow up completely normal, but each case should be examined individually. Christina Hoff Summers, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and author of several books, mentions Justin, an 8 year old boy who likes pirates and battles and had drawn a picture that featured several decapitated heads (Summers). When the teacher inevitably talked to the parents about it, the “boy’s father was astonished, not by his son’s drawing - typical boy stuff - but by the teacher’s lack of sympathy for his son’s imagination” (Summers). The concern about this situation is how the parent responded to their son’s display of their interests. Instead of dismissing similar situations as simply something boys will do, all parents must think about their child individually. The reason a young child could be indirectly expressing violence could be that they were innocently copying something they had seen on one of their video games or in a book they read and just need to learn to separate fantasy and reality. However, if the child conveying violence is also someone who doesn’t have friends and likes to be alone, that is an issue. Parents need to teach boys that they shouldn’t be interested in activities showing violence. These hobbies support the masculine ideas of acting dominant and picking fights with others, and therefore the parent is also encouraging that. The parent can’t dismiss the unsociable child’s actions in that scenario or their sons may grow up thinking that they have to prove they’re men by displaying masculine qualities.

In addition, those boys may think that they’re “being a man” by showing those interests, but they’re really isolating themselves from their peers. They may not make many friends as they
won’t be accepting of others who are different than they are, which limits their social skills at that time and the foreseeable future. Adults must take charge and discourage their sons from a masculine mindset in order to support social and emotional growth. Parents need to monitor their sons if a possible red flag appears or they may not adjust to society when they’re older.

Society must forgo toxic masculinity in order for parents to raise their sons with the security of accepting themselves and others for who they are without judgement. In addition, they ought to teach boys that although they are frequently exposed to misogyny and unrealistic portrayal of women in modern culture, they can’t conform to old perspectives. Instead, this new generation must move forward in social progress so that future generations can reminisce about how far they’ve come.
Works Cited


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