



Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females

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Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force

BOY CRAZY?

During a recent sweltering afternoon spent at a local swimming pool, I overheard a conversation between three girls who were about 12 years old. The conversation went something like this:

“So, I’ve got a secret...she’ll kill me if I tell though!”

“Come on! We won’t tell anyone else.”

“Oh, OK. Aaron officially asked her out and she officially said yes!”

At which point, all three erupted in squeals of delight and swam over to a 4th girl. I could only assume she was the one who had “officially said yes” based on the fact that the others nearly drowned her in their effort to congratulate her on her new status as a member of the exclusive and coveted crowd: couples.

I am pleased to report that these girls also talked about their soccer match from the day before, including cataloging their various injuries and the big plays they made. They engaged in a lively competition over who could do the best “sailor” dive as well. Clearly, these girls had more in their lives than the pursuit of boys, but I still found myself wondering: How is it that girls this young already had such deeply ingrained beliefs about females being worth more when coupled with males? What had they seen or heard or experienced in their young lives that made their reaction to the news that a friend was newly coupled that caused their reaction to be so strong? Such was their frenzy that had there been shark fins and blood in the water, I would have sworn it was the latest installment in the Jaws movie franchise!

It would be easy to immediately fall back on text book explanations like gender role stereotyping in the media and sexist attitudes in society as the cause. There are valid reasons to be found at that level and our culture certainly has room for improvement in its gender role expectations of both females and males. But, I was looking for a reason on a more personal level.

So, I thought about the behavior of women I know, who are intelligent, funny, and independent. Do even these accomplished, successful women act “boy crazy” sometimes? I found the answer to this question to be a resounding “yes”. Trying to get/keep a man has led women I know to suppress their intelligence, quiet their voice both literally and figuratively, laugh at his “jokes” whether he’s being funny or just plain mean, and lose the will to make decisions independent of his input, among other things.

These are women who would bristle at the suggestion that they were in any way compromising who they were but to an outside observer the behaviors are obvious. Before you take me for self-righteous, I admit that I have engaged in these or similar behaviors myself in my lifetime. I’m not proud of it. Not only because I think it can be damaging personally, but because adult women are creating a trap for young women. We are their role models. We are the ones from whom they learn how a woman is supposed to act. We set the standards and the girls are watching. Maybe we can’t easily change the cultural notion that females are worth more if they are coupled with males, but we can start by changing our own behavior. We can have an impact on the young women who see us everyday.

So, what did I do about the girls at the pool? When the frenzy died down and they swam back over to the edge near my chair, I asked them about their soccer team...

Next time, I will show them my sailor dive.

Eight Skills for Young Women to Develop a Hardy Personality from
"Things Will Be Different for My Daughter"*

1. Recognize and tolerate anxiety and act anyway.
2. Separate fantasy from reality and tackle reality.
3. Set goals and establish priorities.
4. Project into the future and understand how today's choices affect the future.
5. Discriminate and make choices consistent with her goals and values.
6. Set boundaries and limits.
7. Ask assertively for what she wants.
8. Trust herself and her own perceptions.

This book includes suggestions for individual and group activities to develop the above skills.

*Bingham M., Stryker S., & Allstetter Neufeldt, S. Ph.D. 1995. *Things Will Be Different for My Daughter: A Practical Guide to Building Her Self-Esteem and Self-Reliance*. Penguin Books. New York, NY.

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