

“He’s Just Being a Boy” II

I kind of agree, Kent. However, this phrase is often very problematic and weighted in various ways. Feminists use it to bash boys and proclaim the existence of the patriarchy and the roots of it, busybodies use it to show that we are bad as a culture and need to control boys, some people use it as a pass of horrible behavior by boys, and some people use it just to not be so anal in how we raise kids.

In the last several years I have seen quite a few people critical of the phrase “boys will be boys.” While I will often agree with these people’s perspective on selected examples of shitty behavior ... I think they misunderstand how the phrase has been generally used, and I think there is danger in how many of these people think.

I do think boys and girls have different tendencies. When people say “boys will be boys” they often infer that they will get into some trouble; roughhouse, break things, be loud, get dirty, small fights, etc. Largely, these are things I think are healthy in many ways for boys and how they will experiment with boundaries, bodies, culture, emotions, etc.

I have been finding recently that many articles are saying that rape, abusing women, or abusive behavior, in general, have been justified under the label “boys will be boys.” While I am sure there have been a minority of people in the past who have done this ... this is not how the term is largely used and it isn’t representative of most boys. This is also not how the term is used by the vast majority of people in the past.

Most boys will want to roughhouse, get dirty and get into minor trouble Few boys want to abuse, and rape. The people who do abuse and rape don’t do it because they live in a culture that is tolerant of roughhousing, or because someone told them once “boys will be boys,” they more likely do it because they have a history of abuse and/or neglect. They have individual problems ... it is not a symptom of the culture and the culture isn’t represented in the phrase “boys will be boys.”

The danger lies in that many people want to stop boys from being boys. Roughhousing, getting dirty, being loud, getting in small tiffs with their friends, and getting in a little minor trouble is good for (most) boys. This is how they learn about themselves and the world. There are many people who view this behavior as toxic, and view men, in general, as broken girls. They redefine “boys will be boys” to be a culture of oppression, abuse and/or rape ... and try to cut off boys from being boys.

It is important to minimize rules with boys (and girls for that matter) and understand that being a little rowdy is part of their nature. Many girls also find this a liberating and growing experience. It is important to allow boys to experiment with it, and to not demonize or over

regulate them. In this way, “boys will be boys” is a term of liberation, empathy, and growth. When 1/1,000 people use the phrase to excuse generally abusive behavior ... it doesn't invalidate the need for boys to be free.