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Breaking News! Boys Have Feelings!

By Malia Blom, JD

As far as I'm concerned, this should garner a big fat, "duh," from most people who read about it, but a recent study to be published in the *Journal of Adolescence* reports that teenage boys are more motivated by love and a desire for relationships than by sex when it comes to dating.¹ I know it's a useful cliché that boys are only interested in sex--and I won't argue with the proposition that men and women often have different attitudes about sex. But do people honestly believe that boys don't approach relationships with the same hopes and fears and emotions as . . . well . . . other human beings? If so, I think it's time that we back slowly away from the chick-lit complaints and romantic comedy plot devices.

I can honestly say that not only am I not surprised by the study, I find it a little offensive that it even needs to be said. As anyone who has ever seen a little boy with a crush knows, boys are all about the romance. I'm not saying (and neither is the report) that sex never enters the picture as a motivating factor for boys, but I'd more or less expect to see the same thing in a study of girls' relationship motivations as well. And to act as though it's a big surprise that boys put value on love and finding a good relationship just feeds into all of the destructive and negative stereotypes about men and boys.

To be fair to the report's authors, they say much the same thing, and note, moreover, that no matter what their outward behavior may indicate, teenage boys are fairly receptive to parental messages about respect and getting to know a girl. Yet, boys get this kind of relationship instruction from their parents much less often than girls do. Perhaps this is a function of the different ways that parents communicate with daughters versus sons, or maybe it just means that we don't place as high a priority on talking to our boys about healthy relationships. Whatever the case, it is a good reminder to overcome whatever awkwardness you might feel about the situation and give your son the same benefit of your hard-earned wisdom. Or, if you're like me and occasionally find your personal wisdom in short supply, general wisdom will do as well.

¹ Parker-Pope, Tara. "Inside the Mind of the Boy Dating Your Daughter." Feb. 15, 2008. <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/02/15/inside-the-mind-of-the-boy-dating-your-daughter/?em&ex=1203570000&en=d7d94f0ae191084a&ei=5087%0A> (accessed Feb. 21, 2008).

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