Teaching Boys to Devalue Women – A Social Reflection

By Sharon Ceres

How do we as a society socialize males to perceive and treat females? Is the fact that calling an individual a sissy or using the derogatory statement that an individual is playing or running like a girl an indicator of how we socially construct females as inferior and devalue females within our society? Both phrases are language acquisitions that are learned in early childhood. Young boys are socialized in their early years to perceive females and characteristics deemed feminine as inferior and to reject not only socially constructed feminine characteristics, but the female as a human being as well.

The rejection and dehumanization of females is a constant and critical agent of masculine socialization that defines masculine identity. Masculinity identity requires males to continually prove that they are not females. It also requires males to treat females as inferior in order reinforce their masculine identity and masculine status within their peer group. In adolescence, males are socialized to sexually objectify women and regulate females to positions defined by male sexual gratification. This sexual objectivity is often established in violent subtexts.

Male slang for females is a prime example. Males often use phrases like “I’d like to hit that,” “I want a piece of that,” and “ I want to tear that *bleep* up” when speaking with one another about females. These phrases use words that signify violence, such as hit and tear. They also address females as it and that – objects. Such phrases make clear that it is the male (I) and his desires (like and want) that regulate the female (it and that) to the position of an object that can be used and abused (hit and tear) for the male’s pleasure (like and want).

We teach our boys these phrases. We teach them that it is socially acceptable to use such language to talk about females. We teach boys to be sexually objective and dehumanize women. We socialize boys that such language is not only socially acceptable, but required to defining their masculine identity. As such, we must ask ourselves as a society how do we want to define manhood? Do we want to continue to define manhood as a rejection of the female by teaching boys to sexually objectify women, dehumanize women and promote violence against females? Or do we want to create a better masculine identity for our children; an identity that is not defined in relation to and the mistreatment of another (the female). Gender equality is only possible if we recognize that as a society we socialize men to devalue women and actively work to change this dynamic.