

Sample Paper

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Introduction

The book *Raising Cain* (1999) by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson, who are both leading child psychologists in the country are contemplating the possible issues when raising adolescent boys. The subtitle of the book; *Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* provides the reader with the main focus of Kindlon and Thompson's book. With their combined thirty-five years of experience working with adolescent boys and their peers and families, Kindlon and Thompson shed lights on what young boys need and most importantly, what young boys are not getting in order to grow into be whole adults. The authors' refer to this as *emotional literacy*, in the way that our society has failed in giving boys the emotional education they need to comprehend the emotional literacy that is to them the "most valuable gift we can offer our sons". The foreground of *Raising Cain* is defined by therapy sessions and experiences with young boys by Kindlon and Thompson, but also interwoven with their own and other adults memories of youth. Bottom-line the book is to give boys emotional resources; "if we teach our sons to honor and value their emotional lives, if we can give boys an emotional vocabulary and the encouragement to use it, they will unclench their hearts" (Kindlon 20).

Summary

The opening chapter of *Raising Cain* starts out describing a case about thirteen year old Luke, who has been sent to the psychologist because of unusual angry behavior (Kindlon 2). This introduction to Luke is to portray what boys experience and it leads the readers to the authors' discussion about emotional isolation and ignorance of boys. The source of this is what the authors' describe as emotional literacy; "that boys suffer deeply as a result of the destructive emotional training our culture imposes upon them, that many of them are in crisis, and all of them need help" (Kindlon 5). The boys are in crisis because they do not possess the literacy to be able to

identify and speak of their emotions, and they need help to understand their emotional state and learn to deal with the feelings of anger, aggression, anxiety, loss and sadness, frustration, fear etc. in order to become emotional literate boys.

Together with the therapy sessions and talks with adolescent boys, the book provides hard on facts, such as in the first chapter it is stated that; “about 95 percent of juvenile homicides are committed by boys” (Kindlon 6). Crime and delinquency has unfortunately unfolded a lot more in the recent decades and “the great majority of crimes are committed by young people – mostly males – who are between the ages of 12 and 25” (Arnett 399). The reason why there is a focus on this is the correlation with boys, and their aggressive behavior. In fact it is considered to be a “boy problem” in which all these violent acts are produced by “emotionally troubled adolescent boys” (Kindlon 6).

Taking on the gender differences in the second chapter, *Thorns among Roses*, the authors takes the reader on a ride to portray all the biologically and developmentally differences between adolescents male and females. The two most distinct developmental differences are; “First, boys mature more slowly than girls. Second, boys are more active and slower to develop impulse control than girls” (Kindlon 31). This first difference becomes a much more related issue to boys and their emotional development when they hit puberty. Because girls enter puberty one or two years before boys do, boys at around age ten or eleven become insignificant to girls – because they still look like small boys and girls become more interested in older developmentally equal boys. The authors’ also talked to girls at the adolescent age and asked whether or not they were excited to enter high school, the girls respond would be; “Oh, yeah, we can’t wait to get out of

here and meet some real boys” (Kindlon 206). Knowledge about this whether it is conscious or unconscious, has an effect on boys and their anxiety.

Furthermore it has an effect on boys’ future relationships and opinion about women as the authors’ point out in the tenth chapter, *Romancing the Stone*;

Anxiety limits a boy’s ability to pick up on external cues, and his anxiety about girls and about his performance with them distorts his perception of them and obscures the cues that might guide him toward a more meaningful experience in relationship. If boys are not taught empathy, then their response to rejection or frustration easily becomes devaluation of girls and women. (Kindlon 210)

The final chapter sums up Kindlon and Thompsons discussions about adolescent boys and the issues they face during puberty. Remembering us all, the readers that “once you understand that to be human is to be vulnerable – whether you are a boy or a girl – then you can go on and be brave, confident, and productive from a solid foundation” (Kindlon 258).

Assessment

When writing a book, especially books like *Raising Cain* – which can also be considered a study – research is needed to provide the bases of discussions like the ones in this book. One emotional and self-development factor that is misinterpreted to adolescent is the biological source. Kindlon and Thompson bring the example of testosterone that “has become a buzzword for masculinity and a popular explanation for all boy attributes” (Kindlon 13). It is the opinion of many that this hormone is the forefront of adolescent development. As it is stated in Arnett’s *Child Development, A Cultural Approach*; “adolescent emotionality is often attributed to ‘raging

hormones' (Arnett 379). Because adolescent is a time where youth experiences a range of new feelings you can't blame it on the biological source. Thus it is most likely the emotional changes happen due to other factors, such as "cognitive and environmental factors" (Arnett 379). Kindlon and Thompsons also recognize this, that these biological differences in origin are not the main reason for boy's behavior; "a scientific studies of preadolescent and early adolescent boys concludes that the research literature 'provides no evidence of an association between testosterone and aggressive behavior'" (Kindlon 13).

The essential strive for masculinity is persistent throughout the book, the expectations in gender are very different and "in traditional cultures [...] boys' manhood is something that has to be *achieved*" (Arnett 382). It is this eagerness to fit in a group and feel respect and accepted that young boys' search for when they are developing their gender identity in order to "establish themselves as successful males" (Kindlon 78). The anthropologist David Gilmore has defined what boys need to achieve in order to be viewed as successful men and it is not only simple things as anatomical maleness – hence it has to be achieved. In most cultures he found that there are three profound categories that a man has to fulfill; (1) provide, (2) protect, and (3) procreate. This developing of masculinity becomes a race for young adults; "when masculinity is defined as an achievement, then manhood becomes 'a prize to be won or wrested through struggle'" (Kindlon 79). They struggle to fight to reach the goal of manhood and masculinity but with a never-good-enough attitude, which is a discussion that Kindlon and Thompson takes with them when describing what needs to be done for our future generation of men to become masculine but with "tenderness, empathy, compassion and emotional vulnerability" (Kindlon 79).

Conclusion

Raising Cain, Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys was a very interesting book to me. Even though knowing about the genetically and emotionally differences between boys and girls, I found the book as an “eye opener”. With the insight of boys and understanding the world through a boy’s perspective it got me to think that there are more to it than what the eye can spot. Being a girl myself and have experienced the frustration over boys and their behaviors when I was in my adolescent years, the book helped decode some of these behavior and actually finding explanations on why some boys behave in a certain way and what might be their reasons for some of their decisions. The correlation between adolescent boy’s behavior and the emotional literacy that Kindlon and Thompson describe throughout the book gave great meaning and combining the examples of boys in the book and people I used to know myself, the book was able to depicts and explain many things that has before been a big question to me about the other sex. The book was indeed compelling and provides an insight into boy’s psyches in every thinkable way, that I would with great confident recommend this book to all, especially women who might feel in the dark, when it comes to boys.

References

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen and Ashley E. Maynard. (2013) *Child Development, A Cultural Approach*. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.

Kindlon, Dan and Michael Thompson. (1999) *Raisin Cain, Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* (2000 ed). New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group.