Toxic Masculinity in Pop Culture and Media

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Toxic masculinity has attracted agitated discussion in recent years. It is the expectation that boys and men must be active, aggressive, tough, daring, and dominant (Flood, 2019). Such a mindset often results in the promotion of violence or emotional repression, male domination, and generally aggressive behaviors in males.

Most of what children learn about masculinity and femininity comes from movies and cartoons, often at a very young age. In popular culture, Disney company plays a significant role in shaping the mindset as parents prefer cartoons to other sources of entertainment. Movies of this and other production companies reinforce the toxic masculine archetype.

Stereotypes play a pivotal role in shaping how we see the world. Primarily, they can reinforce harmful or toxic traits, and similarly, they can emphasize positive characteristics. For instance, being sturdy and robust are not negative traits, and making men ascribe to attain such roles is noble to a certain degree. However, teaching men never to show weakness or vulnerability is toxic and destructive. This essentially takes away the expression of natural emotions that can help a person let go of stress. Owing to this prevalent culture, men are four times as likely to commit suicide compared to women (Beaton, 2016). It also leads to social discord, both in short and long-term prospects.

Particularly, these behaviors are considered the standard of "acting like a man" in society:

- to not ask for help or be vulnerable;

- be stoic and not show emotion;

- not to stay at home and cook;

- to grow a beard, go to the gym, etc.

Media representations of masculinity such as Hercules, Tarzan, Superman, Batman are the main guides that boys use to understand how men should act. They believe that real masculinity stems from physical strength. For men to feel adequate, the majority will strive to achieve such a body. The necessity to be tough and never to express their emotions often drives men to search for relieving this nervous distress, driving most of them to drink or become violent (Primo, 2018). There is barely any mention of mental strength and its importance in these well-known movies and comics.

Masculinity is connected with ill effects on mental and physical wellbeing. Men who follow or are made to follow conventionally masculine cultural norms such as risk-taking, dominance, work prioritizing, emotional suppression, craving to win, and the quest of societal rank, are more likely to undergo psychological issues such as depression, stress, self-image problems, and even substance abuse (Wong, Y. Joel, et al., 2017).

Due to the concepts such as "men don't cry" or "men are strong", both self-reliance and the stifling of emotional expression can have adverse effects on mental health, as they make it unlikely for people to get psychological help or deal with emotions. Hyper-masculinity emphasized in pop-culture movies is highly toxic. As a way to fit in with the rest of society, people have learned to develop masks that embody these traits, while deep down, they are incredibly different people. The unrealistic masculinity epitome set by Disney and other Hollywood films has led young boys and men to suppress their real feelings. This narrative is having an ill effect on society by making youngsters choose to be perceptually real men, rather than good ones.

References

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