

Modernizing Masculinity: The Fall of the Alpha-Male

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How is masculinity defined, and is that definition changing? Ken Gilliam and Shannon R. Wooden convey their thoughts on how Pixar films depict what it means to be a “man” in the twenty-first century in their rhetorical piece titled “Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar.” Pixar films often follow male-protagonists who overcome obstacles in their plotlines by finding themselves in a new light. Wooden and Gilliam claim that these protagonists relinquish their “alpha-male” identities in favor of a more feminized version of masculinity (Gilliam and Wooden 470). As a result, this leads to the resolution of their predicaments. Gilliam and Wooden identify the problems associated with the alpha-male identity and explain how these Pixar films can have a positive impact on the world by providing a new definition of manliness.

What is an alpha-male identity, and why is it problematic for men to identify in such a way? The films mentioned by Gilliam and Wooden, begin with male protagonists who are on top of the world. They have power, control, and have done it all by themselves. However, these characters lack the ability to show emotions other than frustration and anger (Gilliam and Wooden 472, 473). Each of these characters experience a tragedy early in their plotlines where they fall off their pedestal of power, and their alpha-male identities hinder their ability to make progress in their situations (Gilliam and Wooden 474). These characters are depicted as having inflated egos. They lack emotional depth, and often only think about themselves. This is the problem with the alpha-male identity, and why men should adopt new behaviors. Gilliam and Wooden provide examples from three different films and depict how each protagonist has something to lose by remaining an alpha-male, and so much to gain by embracing a new identity. The authors go on to explain how the “emasculatation” of the alpha-male identity can present a more modern man that is accepted for his character rather than his power (Gilliam and Wooden 473).

Gilliam and Wooden believe that the protagonists need to be “emasculated” to grow into better men (475). They must choke on their pride and ask for assistance rather than demand it. Not only must they ask for help, but they must also do so in a caring and respectful manner. The characters are also forced to become emotional and vulnerable to the people around them. This allows them to embrace the strength associated with being part of a community (Gilliam and Wooden 478). These are solid illustrations that advance the authors argument. When a man genuinely cares for his community, the people will be more inclined to follow him. This is not because he has legitimate power, but because he has a genuine personality that empathizes with others. This is “The New Man” identity that Gilliam and Wooden speak of. A man who is caring, emotional, and understands what it means to be a part of something bigger than himself (Gilliam and Wooden 480).

So, why should the definition of masculinity evolve into something new? To conclude, men and women alike are human beings who have emotions. Why is it more acceptable for women to express emotions than men? When men suppress their emotions they become a poster child of the alpha-male identity by isolating themselves, and when that bottle of emotions erupts, it drowns the people around them in a wave of anger and frustration. Men are often afraid to reach out to other people, and therefore struggle in many aspects of life. Therefore, we need a

new definition of masculinity. Gillian and Wooden point out that 200 million people watch a Disney film each year (480). This leads me to believe that people are beginning to accept a new definition of what it means to be a man. Children who watch these films will adopt a new meaning of the masculine stereotype. By doing so children and adults alike will embrace a world where men are caring, and desire to be a part of a community. A world where men are not afraid to express the way they feel.

Works Cited

Gillam, Ken, and Shannon R. Wooden. "Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar." *From Inquiry to Academic Writing: A Text and Reader*, by Stuart Greene and April Lidinsky, 3rd ed., 2015, pp. 469-81.