

Ashley Scarpato

ENG 100

Formal Assignment #3: American Masculinity Redefined

18APR2019

American Masculinity Redefined

“Be a man. Stop with the tears, stop with the emotions. If you're going to be a man in this world, you better learn how to dominate and control people and circumstances" (The Mask You Live In 2015). *The Mask You Live In* “explores how our culture’s narrow definition of masculinity is harming our boys, men and society at large and unveils what we can do about it” (The Mask You Live In 2015). The way that American parents currently define masculinity is harmful to American children and needs to be changed. American parents can redefine masculinity to their sons by teaching how to feel emotions, acceptance of showing emotion, and confidence with their choice to show emotion.

American parents can redefine masculinity by teaching their sons about emotions. At a young age males are taught that showing emotions can cause them to be viewed as weak. In saying weak I mean that males who show their emotions are viewed as lesser of men. This quote from *The Mask You Live In* is a good example: “The idea of being seen as weak, as a sissy in the eyes of other guys, starts in our earliest moments of of boyhood. And it follows us all the way through our lives. Proving to other guys that we’re not girls, that we’re not women, that were not gay. We’ve constructed an idea of masculinity in the United States that doesn’t give young boys a way to feel secure in their masculinity, so we make them go prove it all of the time.” This should not be the standard that is constantly taught. Males don’t have to constantly wear a mask

in order to hide their emotions. Males and females are more alike than we think. Both males and females are human, and all humans have emotions. It's only fair that both genders be allowed to show the emotions they may have without being judged or viewed as different.

The next way that American parents can redefine masculinity to their sons is by teaching acceptance. The new definition of masculinity should include how it's acceptable to show emotions. The parents will have to teach their sons that not everyone will agree with the new definition of masculinity and people may still judge males for showing emotions. The film states "Whether its empathy or aggression or spatial ability or verbal ability, things that a child spends their time on, that's what they're going to be good at." This quote helps to show that some males don't get to choose if they show certain emotions. If a young boy was taught to accept the natural inclination to cry if something made him upset when he was younger then he is they are going to carry this acceptance of crying with him as he gets older. A young male child will think that showing specific emotions is normal because it's what he was taught while he was young. More parents need to teach their sons to accept the difference of opinion regarding showing emotions from the people around them. This quote from *The Mask You Live In* shows how others may respond if a male shows any different kind of emotion "He may still do it, but the expectation is by the time he's 10 that he's perfected it. And if he's 12 and he's still crying in public, there's a problem. Oh, my dear God, are you one of those single tear people? You are a worthless pansy-ass." The negative talk that comes with showing emotions can be tough to hear. But if parents encourage their sons to embrace emotions and not hide behind a mask any longer the negative talk surrounding showing emotions will lessen. The negative talk will begin to lessen because males showing emotions will be more widely accepted and less unaccepted.

One common misconception that people tend to make when they see a male crying or sharing emotions is that the male is homosexual or weak. This stigma needs to change with the new definition of masculinity. This stigma is believed by so many people because it has been around for a long time. But like the definition of masculinity it can be changed. The thought that comes to mind when a male is seen showing emotions shouldn't be that he is homosexual or weak. The thought that should pop into your mind when you see a male showing emotion is that he cares, he has more to him than just anger and aggression.

The final way that American parents can redefine masculinity to their sons is by teaching confidence. If the parents are going to teach their sons that it's fine to show the emotions that they feel the males need to be taught to be confident in their emotions. Males are constantly taught that "A man has to be dominant and in charge and has control. You know, a man does everything to the extreme" (The Mask You Live In 2015). This isn't true. Males don't always have to be in charge and if they show emotions it doesn't make them weak or lesser of a man. It just makes them human. Other people might argue that if a male cries in front of a female she will think lesser of him. Not all females will feel that way. Many females would actually appreciate that the male is showing an emotion that is different from anger or aggression. Males tend to use anger and aggression to hide the other emotions that they are actually feeling. Only showing two emotions all of the time because that is what males are comfortable showing makes it difficult for others to understand how they are truly feeling. Instead, a young boy can learn how to feel confident with being different because he chooses to show his true emotions and not wear a mask of anger or aggression all of the time.

In conclusion, the way that American masculinity is defined needs to be changed. The current definition of masculinity doesn't allow for males to show emotion. The current definition of masculinity also doesn't allow for young males to be confident in their choice to show emotions other than anger and aggression. The change in the definition of masculinity should start with the way that American parents define masculinity to their sons when they are young. Parents should start to teach their sons at a young age that it is acceptable to show emotion no matter what their age. Parents can change the definition of masculinity by teaching their sons how to show emotions, how to accept all of the new emotions that they are feeling and to be confident in choosing to show their emotions.

Works Cited

“The Mask You Live In - A Film From The Representation Project.” The Representation Project, therepresentationproject.org/film/the-mask-you-live-in-film/