

HEALTHY MASCULINITY: EXAMPLES FROM FILM

SERIES, POST 1

We have used different terms when talking about masculinity thus far so let's review:

Masculinity: A set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with men and boys.

Negative or Toxic Masculinity: refers to traditional cultural masculine norms that can be harmful to men, women, and society overall.

This article introduces Healthy Masculinity. **Healthy masculinity** is when men use their physical and emotional strength to champion healthy behaviors and communities. One thing we should address right away is that healthy masculinity is not necessarily saying that aggression and strength are negative or toxic -- Simply that these qualities are not the only ones men should be able to express and get positive reinforcement for. A good example is discussed in the video below. Therapist Jonathan Decker and "unlicensed filmmaker" Alan Seawright discuss how Aragorn from Lord of the Rings (LOTR) is a great embodiment of healthy masculinity. LOTR is a great series of films and I would recommend them to anyone!

There are several great points in this video so let's discuss them one by one:

- **Limiting masculinity** (4:05): Decker doesn't necessarily love the term toxic masculinity but instead likes "limiting Masculinity". The idea here is that if men can't cry, if the only emotions we can share are anger and lust, and if we can't be close with other men, then we are limiting our own potential.

A personal note here is that when I was a young boy, I was told theatre was "gay," and thus I stayed away from it -- even though I thought it would be fun. It wasn't until I learned more and realized I can be a straight male and love theatre, that I started acting. Acting is a great outlet for me but had I not gotten over my previous misconceptions, I would have limited myself. Also, labeling things as gay with an inherently negative connotation is homophobia, and it is another way people try to limit masculinity

- **Decapitating Orcs and then crying seconds later** (5:40): Aragorn can decapitate an Orc one second, and then cry with his fallen comrade seconds later. He does not have to try and be "tough" with his friend. He mourns the loss, kisses him on the head, and sheds a tear. We as men can be both aggressive when the time calls for it and emotional when the moment arises as well.
- **Violence as protective -- not dominating** (10:12): Aragorn is incredibly skilled with his weapons and can kill but only uses his violence to protect. Violence is the last resort when all else has failed.
- **Aragorn and Éowyn's interaction** (11:55): Éowyn wants to go to battle with the men and does not want to stay home with the children. Aragorn sees her and says "I do not think that will be your fate."

Notice that Aragorn does not give her permission. She does not need his permission. He knows when to protect and when to let people find their own path. This is critical for healthy masculinity because the expectation to protect women may lead to a limited or toxic view of masculinity. Aragorn gets out of her way so she can shine.

- **The King gives space to others:** Aragorn has saved Middle Earth and has been crowned king. At his coronation, he sees the Hobbits (a race small in size with hairy feet) and greets them. The Hobbits bow to the new king but Aragorn stops them and says “you bow to no one” He then bows which prompts the entire kingdom to bow to these four hobbits. For context, Hobbits are the smallest people in the kingdom. They are not given a whole lot of space at “the table.” Regardless Aragorn gave space to them at that moment so they could shine for their deeds.

Aragorn is an excellent portrayal of masculinity because he is confident in who he is. He expresses a range of emotions, including love, vulnerability, and humility. These allow him to be the best man he can be. He does not have to second guess if writing poetry will make him look weak and he does not have to dominate every situation. He cares for his people and is not afraid to tell them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Demi is responsible for co-coordinating educational workshops and training offered by Aurora to students, staff and faculty at the University of Minnesota and Augsburg University. Topics for training include consent, healthy relationships, sexual violence at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, and more.

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