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English 102

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The Intersection of Patriarchy and Sexism in Modern World Culture

Why is it that every US president since the foundation of America has been male? Is it that men are born with traits that incline them to be better leaders? Or is it because men are naturally smarter, more capable, more rational than women? The answer to these questions may surprise you. According to “Boys Do Cry (And Shoot)”, an article appearing in *The Baffler*, “boys [are said to be] more sensitive than girls...cry more, are more anxious, have a harder time regulating emotion...are more susceptible to malnutrition and diseases” (Nicorvo para. 3). This is not to say that some of these boys do not turn into exceptional men; however, this *is* to say that if men, statistically, do not develop as well as women, why are there so few female CEOs, supreme court justices; and why have we never had a female president? Among other contributing factors, patriarchy is at fault. Defined by Google as “a social system in which males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property,” patriarchy, because it benefits one sex while subjugating another, is difficult to eradicate. And yet the problems don’t end there.

Due to the fact that men benefit from the implications of a male-dominated society, there are certain “rules” that must be adhered to or else privileges may be at stake. These privileges involve buying into the mainstream, dominant form of masculinity (or hegemonic masculinity) by which a culture abides. This type of masculinity, currently (as masculinity has taken different

forms over the years), is best expressed by anti-violence educator Jackson Katz in his film

Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity:

We can't show any emotion except anger. We can't think too much or seem too intelligent. We can't back down when someone disrespects us. We have to show we're tough enough to inflict physical pain and take it in turn. We're supposed to be sexually aggressive with women. And then we're taught that if we step out of this box, we risk being seen as soft, weak, feminine, or gay (Katz).

Although what Katz espouses may seem a bit exaggerated on paper, this sort of behavior *does* indeed show up in American culture--although it's not totally limited to America. While it's important for some men to uphold some of these norms, abiding by all of them all the time can lead to troubling side effects, such as alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety, etc. Thankfully, issues relating to toxic masculinity have begun to flood the mainstream, in terms of 2017's #MeToo movement. Yet even before that, literature and films have, for a long while, attempted to shed light on these problems. In "Nellie" by Vanessa Barbara, every male character the protagonist encounters, it seems, intends to keep her down, subject her to their rules and whims. Likewise, in Fan Wu's "Nobody's Talking About Falling in Love", Wang, a first-year college student, after getting involved with a sergeant, falls victim to the unfair policies implemented by the male-dominated Chinese government. And in David Fincher's 2010 film, *The Social Network*, Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg), an ambitious college student, creates his Facebook dynasty. However, the ways in which Mark and his cohorts treat women throughout the film (especially Mark's ex-girlfriend), are troubling to say the least.